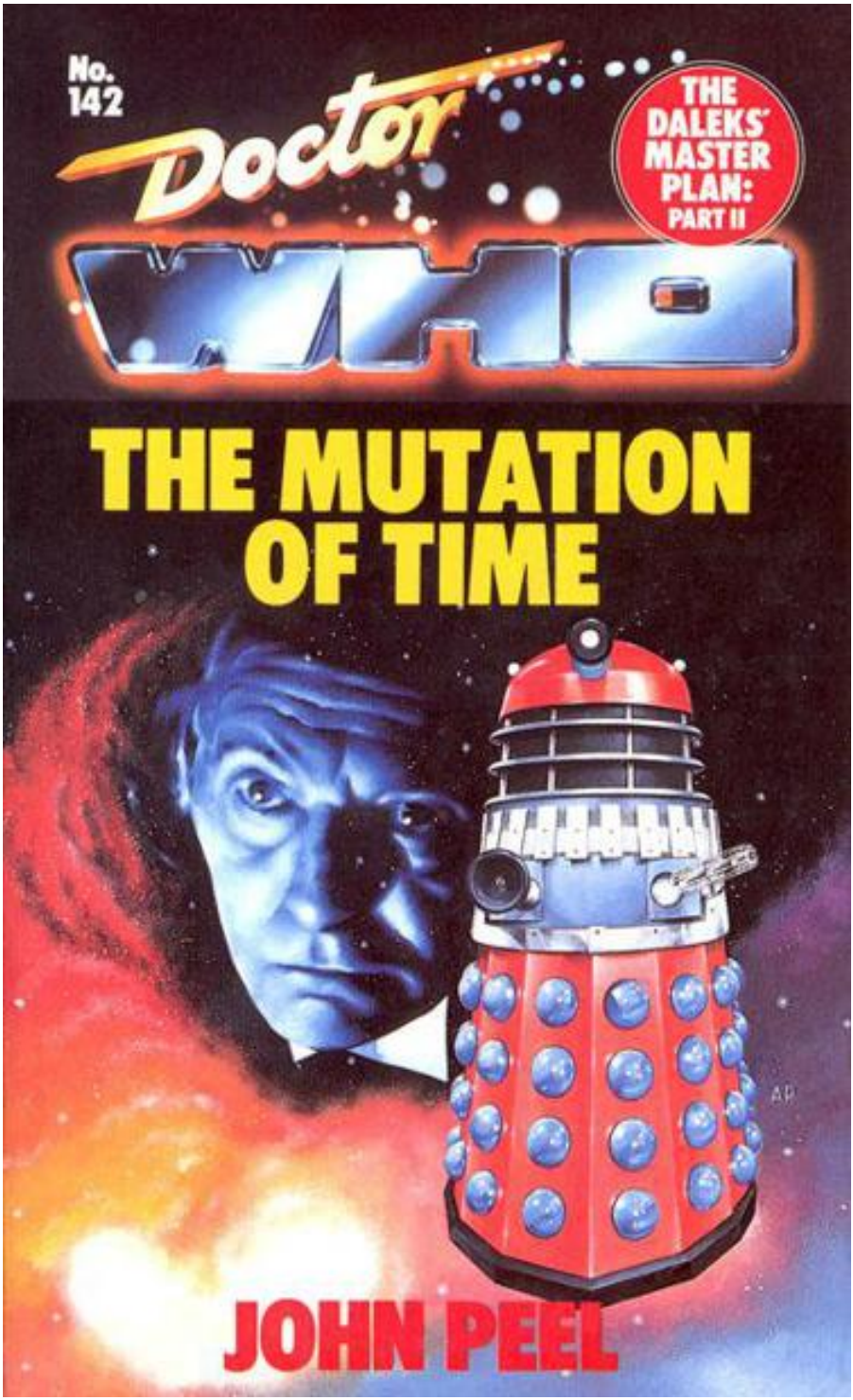
No. 142

Doctor Who

THE DALEKS' MASTER PLAN: PART II

THE MUTATION OF TIME

JOHN PEEL



The Daleks' Masterplan is well under way. With the Time Destroyer, the most deadly machine ever devised, they will conquer the Universe.

Only one person stands in their way – the Doctor.

For he has stolen the precious Taranium core which is vital to activate the machine.

Travelling through Time and Space, the Doctor and his companions are forever on the move in case the Daleks track them down.

But after several months, to their horror, the TARDIS indicates that they are being followed...

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DOCTOR WHO

THE DALEKS'

MASTERPLAN -

PART II

THE MUTATION

OF TIME

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JOHN PEEL

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1

The Nightmare Continues

Sara Kingdom awoke with a cry, sitting upright in her bed.

For a few seconds, she did not recall where she was. Her heart was beating furiously, and she was still shocked from her nightmare. Gradually, as she huddled in the blankets, the room began to make sense to her. By her bed stood the cabinet with the ornate Tiffany lamp – lit. She had reverted almost to childhood recently, and found she could not sleep in the dark any longer. The nightmares seemed to cluster about her then, and she couldn't face that.

It was her old, familiar room in the TARDIS, the one she'd occupied for several months now – though in this erratic, wandering space and time-machine any measure of the passage of time was somewhat

uncertain and subjective. Still, this room was the closest thing she had known to a home since her childhood, when she and Bret had...

She bit back that train of thought, not wishing to bring back the memories of her dead brother, or of the recurring nightmare. She knew she would never get back to sleep now, so she rose and showered. Feeling somewhat better after this, she paused to select her clothing. Despite the large wardrobe that the Doctor had found for her in one of his voluminous store-rooms, she dressed in the inevitable black cat-suit that she had worn since she had met the Doctor and Steven. The emblem of the Special Security Service was emblazoned on the shoulders, and she felt better wearing the old, familiar uniform of the SSS.

Both the Doctor and Steven had long since given up trying to persuade her to wear anything else.

She left her room, and walked almost silently through the corridors of the TARDIS. Her years of training as a special agent had ingrained the habit into her system. She moved like a ghost through the deserted corridors, back towards the main area of the ship. She paused in the small alcove that held the food machine long enough to dial herself a steaming cup of coffee, then moved on to the main control room.

As always, the Doctor was hunched over the controls, nursing them, clucking in mild irritation when one showed any deviation from what he believed it should read. It was ironic, really, since he had no idea how to control the ship once it was in flight. The Doctor had never bothered to settle down and learn how to operate this machine, claiming that he preferred the life of an idle wanderer. She often wondered of this was the real reason, or whether there was more to it. The Doctor let out information about himself as rarely as he could. His past was virtually a uniform blank both to Sara and to Steven Taylor, the other member of the TARDIS party.

The Doctor had little cause to criticize her wearing the same outfit continually, Sara thought - for his own virtually never varied. He was dressed in the chequered trousers, frock-coat and wing-collared shirt that he always wore, and the tie knotted about his neck was as irregular as ever. His long cloak and silver-topped walking stick were on the coat-stand by the exit doors, along with his silk scarf and furry hat, should they be required.

He glanced up from the console, and his brooding was forgotten as he saw her in the doorway. His old - yet somehow timeless - features

creased into a sympathetic smile. ‘Up early?’

She nodded, and moved to join him at the mushroom-shaped control centre. ‘I couldn’t sleep,’ she said, sipping at the scalding coffee.

‘The dreams again?’ he asked sharply.

‘It’s always the dreams,’ she sighed. ‘I can’t stop them. I keep seeing Bret die, again and again. I keep seeing myself shooting him down without pity.’

The Doctor placed a kindly hand on her shoulder. ‘My child, you really must learn to accept that what is past is past. When you shot Bret, you were convinced that he was a traitor to everything you held dear. You couldn’t have known that he was not. Mavic Chen - the Guardian of the Solar System, the most trusted man in the planets - had assured you of that. There was no way you could have known that it was Chen who was working with the Daleks, and not your brother.’

‘I wish I could believe that,’ Sara sighed. ‘But I *should* have known! Bret was my brother, and I should have known he would never be a traitor.’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘My dear, it’s not that simple. Better men than Bret have been corrupted by some hidden weakness in their souls. It *could* have been Bret who was the traitor. You did only what you had to do. The fault is not yours; it is Chen’s. He is the one who is to blame, not you.’

Sara shook her head. ‘You make it sound so simple - like I was just... just a tool he used to do the killing.’

‘And that is precisely what you were, to all intents and purposes.’ The Doctor’s eyes flashed in anger. ‘You had been trained for years, you were honed, polished, and then employed as a crafted tool. The SSS developed this in you.

This is the end result of that kind of training; the conscience is blurred, and whatever you are told to do becomes the right thing to do. Such organizations are powers for great evil, or great good - but the people who work for them inevitably become less and less human. It’s ironic that the guardians of liberty and freedom should be the first to lose their own liberty and freedom, isn’t it?’

‘You’re just trying to make it appear as though I had no choice in what I did when I killed Bret.’

‘I don’t think you could help doing it,’ the Doctor said, gently. ‘You had been trained to obey, and you did as you were ordered. But – and this is what I see as your saving grace! – when you saw what you had done, you began to question. And then you rediscovered yourself – hidden away behind the barriers of the super-agent you had been shaped into. I can safely say that with my help and influence, you have become a productive and fine human being. The person who killed Bret Vyon was the old Sara Kingdom, the tool of Mavic Chen. You, my dear, are a new and better Sara Kingdom – a human being.’

Despite herself, Sara almost. smiled at this. ‘I’d like to believe that.’

‘Then try.’ He looked into the distance. ‘Mavic Chen is the one to be punished, child, not yourself. He plotted to betray the human race into their deaths. He sold out to the Daleks for power, and he led many good people to their deaths.’

Sara felt a burst of anger still within her heart, directed to the supreme traitor. ‘If only I could be certain that he met the death he deserved!’

‘Rest assured that he will have done.’ The Doctor brought his attention back to Sara. ‘He made an alliance with the Daleks, and as soon as they discovered no further need for him, they were bound to have killed him.’

‘I’d like to be certain of that!’ Sara cried. ‘If only we could return and discover what did happen after we left Chen and the Daleks with that fake Taranium core.’

The Doctor patted her shoulder. ‘I’ve often felt like that, you know. To see what happened. To just take another little look... but it cannot be!’

‘I just want to be certain that there was a happy ending,’

Sara answered. ‘To know that all the sacrifices were worth it.’

The Doctor smiled, somewhat sadly. ‘If an old man may be permitted to quote, I’ll give you a little Peter Beagle:

“There are no happy endings, for nothing ever ends.” So, if you found out that the Daleks had killed Chen, then you’d want to find out something else, and then something else after that. There are no endings – everything continues to grow and to progress. One of the reasons that I never learned how to control this old ship of mine was to prevent myself from falling into that trap of yours - wanting to see

happy endings.'

He moved away from her, and he stared into space again. 'It is so tempting, you know. I often wonder what became of the people that I've met – especially those who travelled with me at one time or another. My granddaughter, Susan; I left her to be married on the Earth in the 21st Century. I often wonder what she made of her life. Was I right in what I did when I left her, um? Or Ian and Barbara! Oh, they were a troublesome pair, you know, when we first met! They burst into my ship, and forced me to carry them off. But, over time, we grew closer, and I was sad to see them go. I like to imagine that they got home and married, and raised lots of noisy children. It would be terribly tempting to just drop in, if I had that power. Or –'

He broke off, abruptly returning to the present. 'You see,'

he said, somewhat gruffly. 'If I could control the TARDIS, I'd be forever poking my old nose into the affairs of others best left alone to live their own lives. You try to do the same.'

Sara nodded. 'Let the dead past bury its dead,' she offered.

'Precisely,' the Doctor agreed. 'Or, in our case, the dead future. All times are past in this curious life of ours –

unless we enter into one era, for good or for ill.'

'Isn't it a bit early in the day for philosophy?' Steven asked from the doorway. He was still stretching and yawning, and his hair was not combed properly.

'Ha!' the Doctor snapped back at him. 'All times are a bit early in the day for you. I thought you'd gone into hibernation.'

'Just because you can get by on virtually no sleep,'

Steven began, but stopped as the time rotor in the centre of the panel began to slow and to emit the deep, roaring noise that preceded materialization. 'We're landing!' he exclaimed.

'Most perceptive of you,' the Doctor said, pushing him aside, and moving to power down the TARDIS. As the rotor slowed and fell back to its position of rest, the noise died away. Finally, only the background hum of the TARDIS was evident. The Doctor studied his instruments, flicked several switches, and busied himself.

‘Well?’ Steven finally prompted.

‘Umm?’ The Doctor looked up. ‘Oh, we’ve landed, all right. But according to my instruments, the atmosphere outside the ship is quite poisonous!’

2

The Feast of Steven

‘Poisonous?’ echoed Sara and Steven together.

‘Quite,’ the Doctor agreed, cheerfully. ‘Oh, not lethally so – but it would be very bad for you, I imagine. It’s pollution – smoke and grime, particles of chemicals in the air.’ He paused, reflectively. ‘You know, I’ve seen these readings before, if I could just remember them...’

‘Well, why don’t we have a look outside with the scanner?’ Steven suggested practically.

‘I was just about to,’ the Doctor snapped back testily. He worked the appropriate control, and they all looked towards the screen that hung from the roof. It remained obstinately blank. Clucking to himself, the Doctor tried the controls again, without any better luck. ‘Dear me, it doesn’t seem to be functioning. What can be wrong with it this time?’ He shuffled over to his fault locator. This was part of a panel of computers that constantly checked the TARDIS’s own functions against the prescribed patterns fed into it. The Doctor started it scanning the control systems to isolate the problem.

After a few seconds, a series of numbers appeared on the screen. The Doctor put on his half-spectacles to peer at them. ‘Chameleon circuit,’ he muttered. ‘Time path co-ordin – ah, here we are – scanner element K17.’

The fact that several other items showed malfunctions didn’t reassure Sara very much, but the scanner was the important one. ‘Is that hard to fix?’

‘Mmm?’ The Doctor glanced around. ‘Oh, no, no, not at all. It’s just a small circuit board. I have a spare around, I know. The pollution probably got to it. It just needs to be slotted into place.’

‘Oh, well, that’s easy,’ Steven said, cheerily. ‘Just slot it in, then.’ He suddenly realized that the Doctor was looking rather worried. ‘So, what’s the problem?’

The old man raised an eyebrow, thoughtfully. ‘It has to be fitted from the outside...’ All three of them looked towards the doors – beyond which lay... what?

‘Can’t we just leave?’ Steven asked.

‘And what do we do if we land on another world with the same ambiguous readings, eh?’ the Doctor asked him.

‘No, I’m afraid that the only thing we can do is to venture outside to repair the scanner.’ He crossed the room to one of the roundels that formed the pattern in the wall. He swung it open, and peered within. After a second, out of the jumble of circuit boards within, he withdrew one triumphantly. ‘Just the part!’ His eyes moved towards the doors again. ‘I just wish I could remember what those readings signify. I know that they are familiar...’

The Doctor was not mistaken about the familiarity of the readings from his instruments: the polluted atmosphere belonged to a planet that he knew well. In fact, he had been stranded on the world for several months after a catastrophic malfunction had forced him to rebuild part of the main console, quite a while before. It was when he and his granddaughter were still travelling together, and they had been forced to spend a protracted period on this planet.

It was Earth.

More precisely, it was Liverpool, in late 1965. The pollution was from a British pea-souper, creeping quietly over the face of the Mersey. It was early evening, and the weather was quite brisk. A light powdering of snow had fallen earlier, dusting the dirty streets and making them almost pretty. People scuttled about, wrapped up against the chill wind, and attempting to flash one another cheery smiles. After all, it was Christmas Day, and the season for goodwill and all that.

The TARDIS stood in a small yard, behind a stocky building whose bricks had once been red. Now they were blackened, save for the odd patch of snow. Above the doorway that led into the yard was an old-fashioned lantern-shaped blue light. Each of the panes had the word

‘Police’ etched on them, to alert the public in case they should have need of the services of a Bobby.

There was silence for a moment, and then the sound of a car engine, as a police car turned into the yard. The headlights flashed across the TARDIS, but died, as the driver, oblivious to the odd sight, cut the

motor. He and his partner were too busy attempting to harmonize on the final verse of 'Good King Wenceslas' to notice a police box in the yard. Pleased with their efforts, the two men smirked at one another.

'Beautiful,' PC Welland said, sighing. 'Just beautiful.

We could charm birds out of the trees.'

'Aye,' PC Blessed answered. 'I wish we could charm the birds out of the coffee bars.'

At that moment, the desk sergeant stuck his head out of the back door, looking for the source of the caterwauling to which he had been subjected. As he glanced around, his eyes fastened on to the TARDIS. 'What the – ?' he began.

'Who put that there?'

Welland and Blessed clambered out of the car, and they finally spotted the new police box in the yard. 'Where did that come from, Sarge?' Welland asked.

'I don't know,' Sergeant Ellis snapped. 'Why ask me?

I'm only supposed to know what goes on around here.'

'Well,' Blessed grinned, 'police boxes don't just turn up out of thin air.'

'For all I know,' the sergeant answered, 'this one might as well have.'

'Perhaps somebody sent it to the inspector,' Blessed suggested. 'As a Christmas box!' He laughed heartily at his own joke.

The sergeant was less amused. 'And perhaps you'll both just stay out there and watch it.'

'Why?' Welland asked, annoyed. It was cold out here, and he wanted a cuppa. 'Do you think it's going to fly away?'

'Just you stay there and keep an eye on it. Right?' The sergeant glared at them both, and then went back inside.

Welland shrugged at his partner, and started stamping his feet to keep them warm. 'What do we do now?'

Blessed grinned again. 'How about a few verses of

“While Shepherds Watched”... ?’ he suggested.

Steven was in one of his argumentative moods again, which always brought out the worst in the Doctor. ‘And just why, if it isn’t safe for us, is it safe for you to go outside?’ he demanded.

‘Ah, do neither of you understand?’ the Doctor snapped back. He had donned his long cloak, and fastened it shut.

He began to wind his scarf about his neck.

‘For heaven’s sake,’ Sara butted in, ‘let’s just go outside and repair the scanner.’

‘No!’ exclaimed the Doctor. He donned his furry hat, and then pocketed the circuit board. Where you and Steven come from, the air is pure. Outside those doors, the air holds the worst kind of pollution I’ve ever come across!

Partly burned petrochemicals, suspended particles of...’

‘Then you shouldn’t go out there, either,’ Steven said, trying to be reasonable.

‘My dear boy,’ the Doctor replied patiently, ‘I’m used to all sorts of atmospheres. It won’t affect me. I’ll just pop out there and effect the repairs myself.’

‘And suppose something happens to you?’ Sara asked in concern.’

‘Then – and only then! – can you come out,’ agreed the Doctor. ‘But you must be very, very careful.’

‘And how are we supposed to know if something’s happened to you?’ Steven said sarcastically. ‘The scanner’s broken, so we can’t see out there.’

As usual, when he had no ready answer, the Doctor resorted to intimidation. ‘Don’t be difficult, young man,’

he snapped. ‘Just give me a couple of minutes, and I’ll be back inside again.’

‘And if you’re not?’ Steven insisted. ‘We’re to come out and find you?’

‘Now, look here, my boy, you are to do as you are told.’

The Doctor gestured towards the TARDIS console. ‘Now, just open the doors, and close them immediately after I’ve gone. Immediately!’

Scowling, Steven did as he was bidden. The Doctor crossed to the doors, and stuck his head out of the TARDIS. The first thing he saw was the snow on the ground. The second was a tall policeman, staring incredulously at him. ‘Good evening,’ said the Doctor, politely.

‘Evening, sir,’ Blessed responded, automatically. Then he blinked as the door closed again. He tried it himself, but it was locked. ‘Hey,’ he called to his companion.

‘What?’ Welland asked.

‘You see that?’

Welland looked around. ‘See what?’

Blessed pointed to the door. ‘That then.’

What then?’

‘That door.’

Welland examined the door closely. It was obviously locked. ‘Oh, aye?’

‘It opened.’

‘Did it?’

‘Aye.’ Blessed tried the door again, but it wouldn’t yield.

‘There’s someone in there.’

‘Oh, aye?’

‘I saw his head.’

‘Did you?’

‘Aye.’

‘Oh.’ Welland looked at the door, which remained obstinately shut. ‘Well, then.’

The Doctor was attempting to explain the problem to Sara.

‘Police,’ he repeated. ‘P-O-L-I-C-E,’ he spelled out.

‘Oh, I see,’ Sara said, mistaking his efforts. ‘We’ve landed on your own planet.’

‘What? Nonsense, dear child – we’re back on Earth.’

‘Then why can’t I go outside?’ she asked.

The Doctor had forgotten his earlier cautions about his two companions going outside. Now he remembered what those readings were for! He had spent six long, hard months repairing the TARDIS in that junk yard in Totters Lane, and now felt certain that Sara and Steven could survive in this atmosphere almost indefinitely. There was something else tingling in his memory, though. ‘That smell...’

‘Yes, I caught it when you dashed back in,’ Sara agreed, wrinkling her nose. ‘Burning oil, most unpleasant.’

The Doctor looked disgusted with her. ‘That, my dear child, is the warm and inviting odour of fish and chips!

Ah, it brings back memories...’

Sara looked at Steven, who shrugged helplessly. The Doctor caught this, and smiled, patting them both gently.

‘Of course, you two wouldn’t know about them. In 20th Century England, they were like ambrosia, the food of the gods! A nice piece of crisp, golden haddock and two pennyworth of chips... divine!’ He was making himself hungry just thinking about it. ‘Hot, greasy chips, a pinch of salt, a dash of vinegar... last Sunday’s newspaper...’ He dragged his mind back to the present. ‘That brings back memories! Now, I shall have to go outside and try to distract those policemen. Perhaps offer them a few chips.’

He handed Steven the scanner circuit. ‘You wait here a minute, then come outside and fix the scanner.’

Steven wasn’t letting him off that easily. ‘I thought you said that the air outside was so bad that...’

‘Never mind what I *said*,’ the Doctor said, testily. ‘You do as you are told! Now, open the doors, and shut them when I’m gone.’

‘Yes, *sir*!’ Steven said, sarcastically, snapping off a crisp salute, and

doing as he was told. The Doctor disappeared out of the doors.

Sara looked at Steven with some worry. ‘How long did the Doctor live in the 20th Century?’

‘Oh, on and off for a number of years, I gather.’

‘This fish and chips thing,’ Sara asked. ‘Perhaps they’re habit-forming? Maybe he’s an addict?

Steven considered the possibility. ‘It might explain a few points about the Doctor’s behaviour at that... I don’t understand these people, and how the Doctor can enjoy it here. They ate all sorts of terrible things.’

‘I know,’ Sara agreed, fervently. ‘Especially in the winter. I read about them at school. Pudding and birds and things called mince pies...’ She shuddered. ‘It all sounds disgusting. Food machines are much better.’

‘Yes,’ Steven replied. ‘And perfectly cooked every time!’

‘Without burning the oil,’ Sara finished.

The Doctor peered about, and, seeing no sign of the policemen, stepped out of the TARDIS. As the doors closed behind him, Welland and Blessed jumped on him.

They had been waiting on either side of the TARDIS for their mysterious intruder to emerge.

‘Got yer!’ Blessed exclaimed, suiting his actions to his words.

‘Come along, then,’ Welland added. ‘It’s a fair cop.’

With as much aplomb as he could muster, the Doctor replied: ‘Good evening, gentlemen. Can I help you?’

The two policemen looked over their captive, and their eyes widened as they took in his long, silvery hair, the strange clothes and the long cape. Blessed blinked several times.

Finally, he said: ‘You’re a bit old to dress like a pop singer, aren’t you?’

‘I beg your pardon?’

Blessed gestured with his hand. ‘That funny gear you’re wearing, and that long hair.’

The Doctor regarded him with contempt. ‘I haven’t the faintest idea what you’re babbling about. Now, if you’ll excuse me…’ He attempted to slip from their grasp, but the four hands tightened on him instead.

‘Hang on,’ Welland said. ‘What were you doing in that police box?’

‘And where did you get it from?’ Blessed added. With a confidential wink, he said quietly: ‘Knock it off, did you?’

The Doctor looked at them as though he were a kindergarten teacher and they had been terribly ignorant.

‘Gentlemen, I don’t expect you’ll understand what I’m about to tell you, but that is not a police box.’

Welland nodded, understanding. ‘Of course not. It’s a number forty-nine bus.’

Flashing him a look of disgust, the Doctor finished: ‘It is a machine constructed to investigate the boundaries of time and relative dimension in space.’

The two policemen looked at one another in complete certainty now. ‘He’s a nutter,’ Blessed stated.

‘Escaped from the funny farm, I shouldn’t be surprised,’

agreed Welland.

The Doctor didn’t like the direction that their conversation was taking. He tried to draw himself up to his full height and glower at them, but the effort didn’t pay off too well. ‘Sir!’ he exclaimed. ‘Are you implying that I am mentally deranged?’

‘I told you,’ Blessed said. ‘He’s a nutter.’ He started to drag the Doctor towards the police station door.

‘Careful with him, then,’ Welland cautioned. ‘They can turn very nasty when they’re potty.’ The Doctor did his best to make those words come true.

Sergeant Ellis was never certain whether or not he liked Christmas. Most of the major criminals tended to take the time off, to be home with their families, who wouldn’t enquire too carefully as to which department stores their presents came from, and if they should happen to have receipts. Business, as a result, was generally quiet at the

station, and he could have a few extra cuppas and maybe a warmed-up mince pie or two before heading home.

Unfortunately, Christmas tended to bring out all the nut-cases from the woodwork, and in through his doors. Maybe it was too much Christmas spirits, or maybe it was simply that they knew he couldn't plead a more urgent case and get rid of them.

Ellis glanced up as a man entered the front door of the station house. He was dressed in a long mackintosh, from which he proceeded to shake the snow all over the floor.

The cleaners wouldn't like that one bit. The man had 'nut-case' written all over him as he stomped loudly up to the desk and stared at Ellis. Sighing inwardly, the sergeant looked at the man. 'What can I do for you?'

'I've got a complaint,' the man stated, in a thin, reedy voice. He sniffed, and started to search his pockets for a hankie.

'Well, sir, the doctor's round the corner, and...'

The man found a rather filthy piece of cloth, and proceeded to blow his nose loudly. Then he continued:

'No. I mean, I want to *make* a complaint.'

'Oh, I see.' Ellis reached under the counter and pulled out the standard complaints form. He hunted around for his pen, but there was no sign of it where he'd left it.

Typical! Some people in this place would nick anything, even at Christmas. He dug in his pocket for another. 'Let's have your name, then.'

'They keep movin' me 'ouse,' the man replied.

The sergeant took a deep breath, and counted to ten.

'They keep moving your what?'

'Me 'ouse.'

'Your house?' Ellis echoed. A nut-case, all right.

The man shook his head. 'Me *greenhouse*,' he explained.

‘It’s the rebels.’

‘The rebels?’ Ellis echoed, totally lost now.

At that second, the rear door opened, and Blessed and Welland fell in, hauling in an old man who was struggling to get free.

‘Anyone in CID, Sergeant?’ Welland gasped.

‘Yes, straight through.’

As the struggling trio passed the desk, the Doctor suddenly paused, and stared at the man making the complaint. ‘Haven’t I seen you somewhere before?’ he asked, sharply. Before the man could deny it, the Doctor grinned triumphantly. ‘Yes, of course – I remember now –

the market place at Jaffa!’

Things were getting worse. ‘Jaffa?’ Ellis echoed. Why did these things always happen to him?

‘The young chap said I should come to see you,’ the man continued, ignoring the Doctor.

‘You what?’ Ellis asked, blankly.

‘About me greenhouse,’ the man said. ‘It’s the rebels.’

Ellis closed his eyes, and wished that it would all go away. When he opened them at least part of his troubles were departing – Welland and Blessed were taking the old man through the door to Inspector Windsor’s office. Ellis turned his eyes back to the man in the mackintosh. ‘Now, sir,’ he asked. ‘What rebels would those be?’

Inspector Windsor had been in the force for thirty years now. He resembled a rather run-down basset hound, with dark-circled eyes and a drooping face. He thought he’d heard everything during those thirty years, but he realized that he had been gravely mistaken in that assumption as he heard the report from Welland and Blessed. Finally, he nodded and then turned to the old man.

‘Look, I know there’s a housing shortage, but I don’t think it’s so bad that you have to spend Christmas in a police box.’

The Doctor smiled, as if he’d made a great discovery.

‘Christmas! Yes, yes, yes, of course! That accounts for the holly in the

hall!'

'You mean you didn't know?' Windsor asked, amazed.

'Well, of course I didn't know,' the Doctor replied, giving him a withering look. 'I travel about too much.'

That sparked the inspector's interest. 'Oh? And why's that?'

'The thirst for knowledge, dear boy,' the Doctor explained, with a smile. 'You have a saying in this country, do you not, that travel broadens the mind?' He was fairly certain he was in the right century for that expression.

'This country?' Windsor repeated. 'You mean you're not English?'

'Good gracious, no!' The Doctor looked insulted.

'Scottish?' Windsor knew that the Scots could get uppity if taken for English sometimes. The old man shook his head. 'Welsh?'

The Doctor waved his hand airily towards a wall. 'You'll have to think farther away than that. Your ideas are far too narrow, too small, too...' He groped for the right word.

'Too parochial!'

One of that sort! Windsor sighed. 'All right, all right: what are you, then?'

The Doctor struck a pose, turning his left profile nobly towards the policeman. 'Well, I suppose that you might say that I'm a citizen of the Universe – and a gentleman to boot.'

Blessed looked at the inspector with sympathy. 'He's having us on a bit, isn't he, sir?' Windsor wished he knew the answer to that one.

Steven had decided to improve on the Doctor's plan after he had peeked out of the TARDIS and seen the two policemen manhandling the Doctor into the police station.

He disappeared into the TARDIS wardrobe rooms, and emerged a short while later dressed in a police uniform, finishing off the job by fastening up his coat and placing on the helmet. 'How do I look?' he asked, cheekily.

'Very silly.' Sara shook her head. 'What if the Doctor is all right? He

won't like your interfering.'

Steven laughed, derisively. 'I know that the Doctor's dreamed up some pretty weird plans in his time, but I doubt if he includes being hauled off into a police station as a method to distract attention from the TARDIS. I'll go and see if I can help him out, and you finish the repairs to the scanner. Besides,' he added, 'you're more mechanical than I am, and I'd probably botch the repair job.'

'You'd probably botch the rescue as well.' Sara dropped her hand to the butt of the blaster she always wore, much to the Doctor's disapproval. 'I could get him out of there much faster.'

'I'm sure you could,' Steven agreed. 'But the Doctor doesn't like killing, remember? I can be a bit more subtle about it.'

Sara wasn't so sure about that, but she knew that the acting bug had bitten Steven, and he was determined to go ahead with his plan. 'Oh, all right.' She followed him out of the TARDIS, and watched him dash eagerly across the snow towards the back door. Then she turned her attention to the TARDIS scanner mechanism. It was atop the TARDIS, under the flashing blue light. There was no way she could reach it from where she stood, and she vanished back into the TARDIS to look for something to climb on.

*

'And now they've been and gone and moved it again,' the man said, petulantly.

'Oh?' Sergeant Ellis asked, bored. 'Where to this time?'

'I don't know!' the man exclaimed. 'That's why I came to see you!'

Another figure entered the station, and the sergeant glanced up, eager for any excuse to break off. 'Excuse me a minute,' he said to the man.

Steven looked around. The room seemed primitive, but quite cosy. Christmas cards and trimmings lined the place, and a small bench ran along one wall, under posters extolling the penalties for crime, and offering rewards for information. A pleasing smell of tea permeated the air, along with other scents that Steven couldn't identify. He was suddenly aware of the sergeant approaching him.

Ellis smiled. 'You must be the new bloke from G

Division come to help us out while we're short.'

'I beg your pardon?'

The sergeant frowned slightly. 'I thought you must be the new bloke from G Division,' he repeated.

Steven realized he's been lucky with the officers here expecting a temporary replacement. 'Oh, yes, that's right,'

he agreed hastily, trying to copy the sergeant's odd accent.

'I've come about the old man.'

'What old man?' Ellis asked, puzzled with the youngster's odd accent. It sounded like a bad actor's version of North Country speech.

The man in the mackintosh tugged his sleeve. 'The one that was brought in 'ere a minute ago,' he offered, helpfully.

'Oh, him. He's with CID,' he told Steven. 'You'd better wait till they've finished with him.'

Steven had no idea what a CID was, but his travels taught him that official groups that went by their initials tended to be very nosy – and he knew how badly questions rubbed the Doctor the wrong way. 'Oh, no!' he exclaimed.

'I've got to get to him!'

'Well, you'll have to wait, lad,' Ellis said firmly, placing a hand on his shoulder, and propelling him towards the bench.

'He'll be out here again soon. You just wait over there.'

Steven saw that any further protests would be met with suspicion and hostility, and decided he'd better do as he was told. Meekly, he sat down on the bench, and hoped that the Doctor would be out shortly.

'What about me green'ouse?' the man asked Ellis.

Dragging himself mentally back to the report form, the sergeant nodded, wearily. 'Oh, yes, sir. Now, where was it you said?'

'Well, for a start it's not in me garden!'

Inspector Windsor had finally persuaded the Doctor to take a seat, and

then drew the two constables to one side.

'Was he the only one in there?' he asked, quietly.

Welland and Blessed exchanged puzzled glances.

Finally, Welland shrugged. 'How should I know, sir?'

What were they taking into the police force nowadays?

Windsor always complained about the lowering of standards. 'Well, didn't you *check*?' he demanded. 'There might be a whole army of them, living in one of Her Majesty's police telephone boxes like a lot of gypsies.'

Blessed shook his head in wonder. 'How many people do you think could fit in one of them?' he asked.

Windsor didn't have a ready answer for that, but he nodded to Welland. 'Go on outside, and keep an eye on that box. If anyone else comes out, grab 'em and bring 'em in.'

Sara emerged from the TARDIS with a folding ladder, and with a heavy fur coat on. It had been colder than she had expected the last time she had stepped out. She closed the doors with her spare key, then set up the ladder out of sight of the back door. Before going up to finish the repairs, though, she popped back around the front. 'Where have they got to?' she asked herself. The door opened, but her hopes were dashed when a burly-looking policeman stepped out.

Welland paused, seeing a pretty young woman in an expensive fur coat standing by the police box. 'Hello, hello,' he said, formally. 'What are you up to, hanging around here on Christmas Day?'

Sara tried to sound innocent. 'Nothing.'

Walking over to join her, Welland slapped his hands together for a little warmth. 'Surprised to see a police box here, I suppose.' She'd probably stopped off for a look, he decided. She didn't seem to have popped out of it.

'Oh!' Sara said, finally realizing what the policeman was referring to. She patted the TARDIS. 'You think it's yours!'

'Well, not mine, exactly.' Welland rubbed at the window with his coat sleeve, but could see nothing inside. 'Let's just say it belongs to us. So

why don't you just leave it where it is and move along, eh?'

'I've got to fix it,' Sara replied.

'Fix what?'

'The scanner eye.'

Welland blinked, puzzled. 'The scanner eye?'

'Yes.' Sara pointed to the roof of the police box, where the light was mounted.

Welland nodded. 'We usually get the jokers round here at Christmastime,' he observed, trying to sound stern. 'Just move along, eh?'

'I can't.'

'Oh yes you can, young lady!' Welland glared down at her. 'That's enough of your joking. I'm sure you're going to enjoy yourself at that party you're going to, so why not go down there now?'

Sara couldn't follow this line of thought. 'I'm not going to a party.'

'Then what are you doing, dressed up in them fancy clothes?' Welland felt his logic was impeccable. A funny outfit under a fur coat meant a party of some kind. Real Sherlock Holmes deduction stuff, that. 'You leave now, and there won't be no trouble.'

'I've got to stay here.'

'You take my advice, young lady, and leave now.' He leaned down and added: 'Otherwise, I might have to run you in for loitering, or something like that, and I wouldn't like to have to do that. We've had a bit of trouble already tonight. We don't like people hanging about, but at Christmastime we are a bit lenient. We wouldn't want to make it difficult for you.'

Clearly, however, he intended to make it very difficult for her if she stayed around. Sara shrugged, and started to move off, as though the whole thing wasn't of the slightest interest to her.

Welland watched her go; a pretty lass. He dug into his memory for the right phrase, and called after her: 'Have a swinging time.' She waved, and walked around the corner.

Welland turned back, and stuck his hands under his arms to warm them. ‘Funny girl,’ he muttered, and started to stamp his feet to warm them up.

A moment later, Sara popped her head quickly around the corner. The policeman had his back to her. Quietly, she slipped behind the TARDIS, and started in very gingerly fashion up the ladder, praying that the rungs wouldn’t creak and alert him to her return. Then she reached into her pocket for the replacement component, and started to work on the scanner circuits.

Sergeant Ellis peered up from his copy of the *Police Gazette* at the young replacement policeman, who was pacing up and down now. ‘Why don’t you sit down, lad?’ he asked, in a kindly voice. ‘You’re making the place look untidy.’

Steven caught himself in mid-step, and almost fell over.

He had read all the posters several times, and stared at the door of the CID office for so long, he was sure that nothing would happen. Or that, if it did, it would involve the Doctor, a cell and a key being tossed into the nearest river.

To his surprise, the door to the inner office opened, and the Doctor strode imperiously out.

‘Is everything all right?’ Steven called.

The Doctor paused to examine his young companion in his unfamiliar clothing. ‘Of course, of course,’ he lied. ‘But what are you doing here?’

Steven suddenly noticed that another man was examining him critically. Finally, Inspector Windsor demanded: ‘Who are you? Do you know this man?’

‘Yes,’ Steven replied hastily. Then, realizing his accent had slipped, he added: ‘I mean, aye.’

The sergeant took pity on him, mistaking his flustered response for nerves on meeting the Inspector. ‘It’s the relief constable from G Division, sir,’ he explained.

‘Yes, that’s right,’ Steven agreed. ‘I’ll look after him.’

Windsor scratched his neck, thoughtfully. ‘Well, if you know him, perhaps you could tell us what he’s doing in a police box?’

‘A *what*?’ Steven tried to sound amazed.

‘That police box across the yard. He claims he lives in it.’

Steven nodded, confidentially. ‘Last week it was a post box,’ he whispered. ‘We caught him trying to mail himself.

It’s all right – he’s a funny fellow, but we’re used to him down in G Division.’

Windsor was glad to see the back of the lunatic. Why did they always come out and ruin his Christmas? All he ever wanted was a nice helping of plum duff, and a hot dollop of custard... ‘Very well, get him out of here. And see he stays clear of that police box.’

Steven snapped off a pretty creditable salute. ‘Right, I’ll do that. Come along, old man.’ He tugged at the Doctor’s sleeve. The Doctor tore himself free of the grip, and stared at him with haughty mien. He did lower his voice, at least.

‘Less of the *old man*,’ he hissed. ‘And what’s with the funny accent?’

‘Well, everyone else is doing it,’ Steven protested.

The Doctor raised his eyebrow in disapproval, and then allowed Steven to lead him outside. Sergeant Ellis followed, eager to see the last of the old man. As they all walked through the door, Welland snapped into an alert pose, then decided he’d better look busy. He started to look round the yard, and spied Sara, coming down the ladder at the back of the TARDIS.

‘Here!’ he yelled, and grabbed her. ‘What are you doing?’ he turned helplessly to the sergeant. ‘I don’t know what it is about this police box. First that old man comes out of it, and now I catch this one climbing about on it.’

Sara decided that she’d been polite for quite long enough. ‘Let me go!’ she demanded.

‘It’s all right,’ Steven said, stepping forward before she could go for her hidden blaster. ‘I know her.’

‘Aye?’ the sergeant asked. ‘Well, you seem to know all the queer people. Who is she?’

‘She’s a...’ Steven groped for a plausible explanation. ‘A friend of the

old man's!'

The talking was getting them nowhere, Sara could see.

'Let me go!' she repeated, firmly, tugging at Welland's grip. As he shifted to keep the hold, she spun about, grabbed his arm, and threw him clean over her head into a pile of snow. Welland hit the ground with a thump, and lay there, dazed.

Ellis started to move in, and Sara grabbed his outstretched arm, twisted, and Ellis followed the same path as Welland. The two policemen struggled to regain their feet and subdue this unexpected wildcat. They were just in time to see the old man, the wildcat and the young replacement from G Division disappearing into the police box. The door slammed shut.

Ellis and Welland dashed over, and started to hammer on the door. As they did so, the light on the top of the box began to flash, and then the box melted away with a terrible groaning sound. The ladder that had been propped against the back of the box promptly fell on to their feet.

Ellis howled in pain, and tossed the offending article into the snow drift. Then he and Welland stared at the spot where the police box had stood, seconds earlier. All that was left was a black square of snowless tarmac.

The sergeant stared at Welland. 'What are we going to tell the inspector?'

'I don't know. Whatever it is, it'd better be good.' Both of them returned their gaze to the empty spot, seeking inspiration that stubbornly refused to come.

Somewhere, in the distance, a group of carollers began singing 'God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen'...

3

The Toast Of Christmas Past

Within the TARDIS, the Doctor leaned on the control console, breathing rather heavily, but with a happy smile on his face. Steven removed his police helmet and coat and tossed them over a chair before crossing to join the Doctor.

Sara threw off her heavy coat and grinned as she came over.

‘Sara, you were marvellous!’ Steven exclaimed in admiration.

‘I agree,’ the Doctor added, smiling. ‘Very impressive.’

‘Where did you learn to do that throw?’ Steven asked, obviously hoping for a quick lesson himself in the technique.

‘Space Security training school,’ Sara answered dismissively. ‘All the girls had to learn unarmed combat in all forms.’

‘I’ll bet you were top of the class,’ Steven flattered her.

She was a very attractive girl, and Steven never gave up hope that she’d find him similarly interesting.

‘As a matter of fact, I was never that good at it. The instructor thought I’d fail. You should have seen some of the girls who were good at it.’

The Doctor chuckled. ‘Well, I for one would give you full marks, my dear.’

Deciding that it was time to change the subject, Steven asked: ‘Did you fix the scanner?’

‘I did,’ Sara said, rather primly. ‘And with no help from either of you.’

The Doctor nodded, happily. ‘It’ll be good to have it working again. Did you test it?’

‘Of course not. That man grabbed me before I had a chance.’ She glared at the Doctor, wondering if she ought to tell him that it was time someone else did some of the work. Wisely, she decided not to raise the subject.

The Doctor wandered thoughtfully over to the fault locator to see what it had to say. As he did so, his eye came to rest on an object that was in the same roundel that he had earlier removed the circuit board from. Gently, he reached it and brought it out. ‘The Taranium core,’ he said softly.

Instantly, the jollity was banished from the room. Sara looked at it, and her face fell as she recalled the price that had been paid before they had managed to steal the core from the Daleks. She saw, for a brief second, the look on Bret’s face before he had died – at her hands. She shook her head to clear away those terrible memories. ‘I’d

forgotten about the Daleks,' she whispered.

'Now, that's one thing you mustn't do, my dear,' the Doctor chided, returning to the console. 'They built a time machine like this once before – and with an access now to Taranium, perhaps they could construct another to follow us through time and space. Their time machines require considerably less Taranium than is present in the core –

which might give you a faint hint of the power within this small device! It contains enough Taranium to power a hundred time machines – so whatever the Time Destructor is that this item is the core of, it must be able to unleash dreadful forces!'

'But while we have the Taranium core, their plans cannot work,' Sara objected.

'I know,' the Doctor agreed. 'But I hardly think that the Daleks will attack the Solar System until they have tested their Time Destructor. I think perhaps it might be advisable to destroy this core as soon as possible.'

Abruptly, he smiled. 'Do you know, I never did get my fish and chips?'

This abrupt change of topic brought a frown to Steven's face. 'I wish you hadn't said that,' he complained. 'Now *I'm* hungry, too!'

'Well, let's see if I can rustle up something on the food machine that will please us both,' suggested the Doctor.

Before he could follow this plan, however, the time rotor began to slow, and the distinctive noise of materialization started to flood the room. 'That's strange,' he muttered, scurrying back to the controls. 'We're landing already.' He examined the instruments with care as the rotor came to a rest. 'I'm afraid we can't have moved very far – the TARDIS computers couldn't have reset properly. Dear, dear.'

'Do you have any idea where we are?' Sara asked.

'No, not really. But with reduced power, it's safe to assume we are still on the Earth, and probably only thirty or forty years off from when we were last time. Atmosphere and gravity – all check for the Earth. Let's have a look at the scanner, my dear. It should tell us something this time.'

'Wouldn't it be nice to find a quiet, relaxed place,' Sara said,

hopefully. ‘Where people are friendly, and there’s an oasis of calm away from the general troubles of our travels.’

‘Fat chance,’ Steven said, insensitively, and pointed to the picture on the screen.

It was clearly a turn-of-the-century sawmill, of the type used in the vast timberlands of the American West. A large circular saw stood in the centre of the room, and stacked planks were neatly arranged about the walls. Sawdust covered the floor, and through the opened door could be seen trees and a clear blue sky. The tranquillity was shattered by a terrified scream.

A man in a dark cape, wearing a tall black hat, was dragging a young girl into the mill. He glanced around to make certain that the room was empty, then twirled his long moustaches. His suit bespoke wealth, as did his frilled shirt and highly polished black leather shoes. The girl, on the other hand, was clad in a long gingham dress, her blonde hair done in long curls. She screamed a second time, and whatever else might be amiss, there was certainly nothing wrong with her lungs.

‘If you’ll not be mine, you’ll be no one’s!’ the man cried, throwing her down on to the table that held the huge circular saw. The girl struggled, but he was too strong for her to break free. Laughing, he used a convenient stack of ropes to lash her to the plank on the table.

‘Scream all you like,’ he sneered. ‘There’s no one within ten miles of this spot!’ She took him at his word, screaming with renewed vigour as he started up the saw. He then dashed back, and gripped the plank to which she was firmly bound, and began to push it slowly towards the spinning blade, laughing demonically all the while.

Steven and Sara acted at once as they saw this happening. Steven hit the switch to open the doors, and both of them sprang out of the TARDIS. The man glanced around, startled, as Steven ran across to him. Steven drew back his arm and punched the leering villain full in the face. Sara jumped at the switch and turned off the saw, then moved to help free the trapped girl. The Doctor, slower on his feet, was just closing the TARDIS doors behind him as he emerged.

To the astonishment of Steven and Sara, the girl sat up, the ropes falling free. She looked anything but happy to be rescued. ‘You’ve ruined everything!’ she pouted. As the travellers looked at one another in puzzlement, a voice from behind them screamed: ‘CUT!’

Slowly, Sara, Steven and the Doctor turned around.

Instead of the wall of the sawmill, they could see a large open space. Cameras, lights and other instruments stood about. Most were manned by people with decidedly unfriendly expressions on their faces. The darkest glower came from the man who leaped out of the seat marked

'director'. He was dressed in jodhpurs, and carried a swagger stick under one arm. A monocle dangled on its golden cord, having fallen from his right eye when he yelled. In his right hand he held a megaphone, which he hauled to his mouth. 'Cut! Cut! CUT!' he added, for the benefit of anyone who'd missed his earlier bellow.

The director strode on to the set, followed by a half-dozen men, all paying careful attention to him. He swung to face one, and practically rammed the megaphone into the poor unfortunate's ear before yelling: 'How did those bums get in here? It must be sabotage! Everyone wants Steinberger P Green's latest film to be a failure! It's de Mille again, I bet! Get the studio police! Get those bums outta here! You hear me?'

There was no way that they could miss hearing this, and the six men promptly turned to look at the Doctor and his companions. A couple of the technicians gathered about the lights and cameras shot off, presumably after the requested studio police. The others began to move forward on to the set.

Sara sized up the situation quickly. They could not return to the TARDIS, for the men here would be on them before they could get the door open. There seemed to be a doorway out of this place that the two running men had taken, and that looked like their best chance! 'Follow me!'

she snapped at the Doctor and Steven, and then hurled herself against the oncoming men.

They were rather taken aback by this, not expecting to be attacked, and especially not by a woman. Sara's unarmed combat demolished three of the technicians before the others had a chance to react. Those that did react generally did so by beating a hasty retreat.

'Grab her!' Steinberger P Green yelled into his megaphone. 'Start the cameras rolling! Get this on film, you idiots!'

Steven ploughed after Sara, adding a few punches of his own to the resulting mêlée. The Doctor shook his head in disgust, and was left with little option but to follow his young, impetuous companions. The

three of them made their somewhat violent way through the throng of people, and the Doctor joined in from time to time, jamming his stick between legs, rapping knuckles, or poking people in the stomach. Sara simply grabbed, thrust, threw and hacked her way out. Steven continued punching until he ran out of people to hit. Then the three of them dashed through the door. The Doctor slammed it behind him.

The movie set was a disaster area. People lay all over it, nursing portions of their injured anatomies – if they were still conscious. Several of the lights had collapsed, and the huge bulbs had exploded. Director Green spun about, yelling through the megaphone: 'Great! Great! What action! What movement! What...' His voice trailed off as he realized that no one was manning any of the cameras.

'What?' he screamed. 'Don't tell me that we didn't get any footage of that fight?'

There was a small tug on his elbow, and he glanced about. The villain in the frilled shirt – actually an actor named Darcy Tranton – was holding one hand over his eye. 'My eye,' he moaned. 'Look at my eye!' He moved the hand, revealing a swelling, and a definite shade of blackness.

Green pointed the megaphone right at him. 'Shut up!'

he yelled. 'I miss getting the greatest action scene I've even seen on film, and you complain about your eye!'

'My ears!' Tranton moaned, covering them up. 'My eye!

My ears!'

The girl, Blossom LeFauvre, simply sat on her plank and cried. She hated not being the centre of attention.

Steinberger P Green whipped around again, and pointed his megaphone in the direction of the crowd milling round the door. 'Find that girl!' he howled. 'She handled my men like they wuz dolls! She's going to be the star of my next movie! I'm gonna make her the biggest star Hollywood ever saw! She's gonna make me rich! Don't just stand there, you numskulls – find her!'

Sensing her own job fading away, Blossom sobbed even louder. No one paid her the slightest attention.

Steven had paused to allow the Doctor to catch up with him, and

when they looked around, Sara had gone.

Guessing at a direction, they set off to look for her. As they passed a building, the Doctor gestured with his stick. ‘Let’s try in there.’

The door was unlocked, and they slipped in. It was obviously a wardrobe building of some kind, because literally thousands of costumes hung on hundreds of racks

– clowns, cowboys, firemen, ballerinas, French courtesans... the place was like a warren, with walls of cloth.

A man suddenly appeared from one of the cross-rows, carrying a clip-board and pencil. ‘There you are!’ he exclaimed. ‘Come on, your costumes are over here. Let’s get a move on.’

‘But...’ Steven began to protest. Then he heard the sound of footsteps approaching outside, and realized that the pack was still on their heels. The Doctor caught the noise, too, and nodded. They followed the man with the board, and discovered that they were expected to play policemen. Steven grinned. ‘I’m getting the hang of this!’

After a few moments, Sara saw that she had lost Steven and the Doctor. They had obviously fallen behind somewhere.

She started to retrace her steps through the maze of buildings, when she saw the crowd that had been chasing her round the corner. There was much pointing and cries of ‘Stop!’ and ‘Hey, you!’ Sara dived through the nearest door. It was into the property department, and the place was littered with all kinds of conceivable items that a film-maker might call on for his latest picture, from dining-room sets to Indian tepees or from a full-sized steam locomotive to a chess set. With the sound of pursuit getting closer, Sara looked around for somewhere to hide. The only thing that seemed possible was a large oriental basket.

She slipped into it, and pulled the lid closed over her, hoping that her pursuers would not think of looking in it.

A moment later, the door opened. It didn’t sound like the men who had been chasing her, as two quiet voices conferred. ‘That’s the one over there, Al. Grief, listen to that racket. Steinberger must’ve flipped his top again.’

‘Yeah,’ Al agreed. ‘Come on.’

To Sara's horror, the two men picked up the basket she was hiding in, and carried it out of the door. She didn't dare try to get out, because she was certain to be seen by the hunters. All she could do was to lie still and hope that she would have an opportunity to get out soon.

Something of the same thought was passing through Steven's mind at exactly the same moment – though for very different reasons. He and the Doctor had been hastily dressed in the police uniforms, which were singularly ill-fitting. Then they were hurried outside a different door, where a car of sorts was waiting. It contained more men in the uniforms, all armed with large truncheons. Steven and the Doctor were ushered into the open back of the vehicle, along with most of the other policemen. Then someone yelled 'Action!', and the car started off.

The trouble began right away. The driver took a corner at high speed, tipping the car almost on to its side. One of the policemen fell out, grabbing Steven as he did so.

Steven, in his turn, gabbed at the next policeman in the car. The grip of the man er the side was gradually dragging him over too when the car turned sharply, and he was flung out. Luckily, he retained his grip on the policeman still in the car, who in turn grabbed at another.

In seconds, there were five of them, strung out in a line, being dragged behind the car... the Doctor looked on helplessly as the line of police wagged from side to side with ever more eccentric driving of the vehicle.

Neither he nor Steven knew what the words painted on the side of the squad car meant. They read: 'KEYSTONE

KOPS'.

The sheikh moved forward dramatically, sweeping into the tent of his beloved. Slave girls swooned, and the mistress of the tent hastily flung her veil across the lower half of her face. 'I will come to you on my camel, and sweep you away across the desert!' the sheikh vowed.

'Cut! Cut!' A thick, Scandinavian figure in his mid fifties crashed on to the set, gesticulating wildly. 'No, no!'

he screamed at the actor in his thick accent. ' *Terrible!*

You've got to give it more *feeling*.' His gestures suggested that he'd like to rip the actor's heart out. Perhaps he did feel that way, for he was

Ingmar Knopf, the Great Dane, and current champion of the box office. He pointed to the scantily clad actress, who was gazing off into the distance, trying to stay aloof. 'She is not a sack of potatoes.'

'No,' the girl agreed in thick, Russian accents. 'But *he* is a sack of potatoes. Vere did you find heem? On a rubbish dump?'

'I resent that!' the sheikh said, pouting.

'Ach!' The girl snapped her fingers at him. 'I give that for your resenting.' She mopped her brow, dramatically. 'I vant to be alone.'

At that moment, Steinberger P Green bounced into the room, several of his yes-men trailing, and peering everywhere. 'Did you see them?' he howled at the top of his voice. 'Two guys and a gal? They just beat the living daylights out of my camera crew! It was *great*!'

Sara peered out of the basket in the tent set, and hastily closed the lid. There was no exit for her quite yet, it would seem. Ingmar Knopf was less than thrilled with the interruption. He glared angrily at Green 'I am trying to make a motion picture in here. Kindly remove yourself and that... that riffraff.'

'Do you know who I am?' yelled Green.

'You, sir, are a boor! And if you do not leave, I shall have you ejected!'

'You can't talk to me like that!' Green yelled, and turned to his yes-men. 'Get him, boys!' They didn't show much enthusiasm for the idea, and Knopf summoned his own camera crew into action. In moments, the place had degenerated into a free-for-all.

The sheikh stared at the scene, then walked over to tap Ingmar Knopf on the shoulder. 'Now, look here, Mr Niff...'

'Knopf!' the director yelled. 'Ingmar Knopf, you doltish lout!'

'You can't talk to me like that!' the sheikh huffed. 'I am an actor!'

'You are not an actor,' the girl yelled from the set. 'You are a cheap peeg!'

Sara decided that in all the fuss, she might be able to sneak back to the TARDIS. She slipped out of the basket, only to run into the stage manager. Like so many people in this inexplicable place, he was carrying a clip-board. He glanced up, and then shook his head.

‘That’ll never do,’ he said, firmly. ‘Get those clothes off.’

‘I beg your pardon.’

‘Get ’em off,’ the man repeated, pointing at Sara’s outfit.

‘It’s all wrong.’

‘I shall do no such thing,’ Sara snapped.

Thinking he was dealing with a moody actress, the man took her arm, aiming to give her a good talking-to. Sara thought he was about to try to remove her clothing by force, and promptly tossed him clean through the painted backdrop.

Steinberger P Green looked up at the man hurtling along. ‘I recognize that style!’ Glancing around, he spotted Sara. ‘There she is!’ he yelled. ‘Grab her!’

Sara took off as fast as she could manage. Green’s men tried to separate themselves from the fight to follow her.

Knopfs crew, thinking they had Green’s mob on the run, chased after them. Things were not going well for anyone.

Knopf threw his script to the floor, and started tugging at his hair in despair.

‘I should never have agreed to make a film in America!’

he wailed. ‘They have no artistic sense!’

The actor materialized again, tugging at Knopf’s sleeve.

‘Mr Nipp...’

‘Knopf! Knopf, you numskull!’

‘... I demand an apology. You hurt my feelings with your insensitive words’

Knopf glared down at him, his face slowly turning crimson. ‘You – demand – an – apology?’ he breathed. ‘I shall give you something!’ His fist shot out, connecting very solidly with the actor’s jaw. The actor’s eyes crossed, and he collapsed. For the first time that day, lngmar Knopf felt satisfied.

The Doctor and Steven had finally managed to extricate themselves from the mad policemen. The car ride had been bad enough when everyone was falling out of it, but when they were heading for a steam locomotive at full speed, Steven and the Doctor had looked at one another and with one accord leaped from the car. They were not alone in this move, and were quite surprised to find that the side of the road at the point they had jumped was padded. None of this was making any sense at all to them. They did, however, know when it was time to retreat. Shedding the police uniforms, they retreated at top speed.

They soon found themselves back in the main area of the lot, where the sound stages were situated. The Doctor was certain that the whole adventure had some inner meaning that he was trying to fit together. Steven, on the other hand, was of the opinion that they were in some huge mental asylum, and just wanted to find Sara and escape before one or more of the lunatics here actually succeeded in killing them.

The Doctor shrugged, and tried the first door that they came to. It led into another large building, this one with the inevitable lights and cameras. The people here, however, were not as frenetic as the others that they had encountered. On the contrary, everyone sat around looking glum. One man, the director, was shredding a thick wad of papers and tossing them rather haphazardly towards a waste bin.

The set was of a large restaurant dining-room. Tables were laid, and piles of food made the huge banquet table groan under its weight. Sitting despondently at one table was a pale-looking young man, dressed oddly even for this place. A grubby black bowler was perched on a shock of dark hair. His small moustache drooped unhappily over his mouth. His suit was several sizes too small in some places and too large in others. A wilted flower hung from his buttonhole, and he twirled a walking stick slowly in his hands.

The sight of all that food reminded Steven of his earlier remarks in the TARDIS. ‘Hey, I’m famished, Doctor. You think they’d miss some of that?’ Without waiting for a response, he shot towards the table, and began to help himself. The Doctor shook his head, and went to talk to the little clown. ‘Is there anything I can do to help?’ he asked, gently.

The clown looked up. ‘I shouldn’t think so, unless you’re a script-writer. We need a new ending for this film.’

‘I’m afraid I’m not a – what is it? – script-writer, but I am rather good at solving problems. Perhaps if you were to explain...?’

‘Why not?’ the man shrugged. ‘Everything in the film to far has been terrifically funny, but... well, we need one big belly-laugh to finish it all off – and we’re stuck for ideas.’

The Doctor glanced around, a twinkle in his eyes. ‘And this is the set for the last scene?’ He had finally realized where they had landed – a movie company! He had seen films before in his travels, but never known how they were made. Suddenly, everything was coming together.

‘Yeah.’

‘Well, I think I know how to solve your ending. If I may demonstrate...?’

‘Be my guest.’ The clown signalled to the director to start up the cameras, as the Doctor crossed to where Steven was munching away. Glancing around, he saw a large custard pie, and lifted it up, thoughtfully. Then he tapped Steven on the arm.

‘Excuse me, my boy, but I’d like your help in a little demonstration.’

Steven looked around, his mouth rather full. ‘Sure thing. Hey, that pie looks good.’

‘Really?’ asked the Doctor innocently. ‘Would you like some?’

‘Sure.’

With a cherubic smile, the Doctor slammed the pie full in Steven’s face.

For a second, there was silence, then the clown doubled over, laughing. Steven stood there, a shocked expression on his face that gradually turned to anger as the custard dripped down his features. He turned and picked up a pie, and then hurled it at the Doctor...

... who ducked. The pie caught the clown in mid-laugh, silencing him for a second. Than, with exaggerated motions, he dashed for a pie and hurled it at an actor dressed as a waiter.

‘Great stuff! Great stuff!’ the director enthused, as the cameras caught all this. ‘Everybody into this! Move!’

The other actors piled on to the set, and the fight began to increase in tempo. Pies, tarts and flans flew furiously.

Pitchers of water and other drinks were spilled over anyone in sight. No one much minded who was hit with what.

The doors burst open as Sara shot into the set, looking for escape from Steinberger P Green and his men. Spotting the Doctor weaving his way through the food fight – and miraculously unscathed by all of it – she headed straight for him. She was followed by the technicians and yes-men.

As Sara struggled to reach the Doctor, a pie caught her right in the face. Wiping the custard from her eyes, she glowered at the man who had thrown it, who was laughing.

She grabbed one of his arms and hurled him onto the table.

He landed with a squelch.

Green's men ran into a barrage of pies and food, and instantly lost sight of Sara. They were too occupied with getting their own back and defending themselves with whatever edible weapons came to hand.

Sara had just pushed someone into a large cake when the Doctor managed to get to her. 'I think it's high time we were out of here,' he muttered. Sara couldn't have agreed more, and together they made their way to where Steven was alternately eating and pushing food into people's faces.

'Back to the TARDIS!' the Doctor told him. With a nod, the young man followed. They left the raucous mob behind them, still heaving food in all directions. The director was ecstatic.

Outside, they broke into a run as Sara led them back to where the TARDIS had originally landed. With Steinberger P Green's men no longer hunting them, they could get back without much trouble.

'Where've you been?' Steven asked her, as they dashed between buildings.

'I don't know,' Sara replied. 'But a strange man kept telling me to take my clothes off!'

'It's a madhouse,' Steven reflected.

The studio where they had landed was now deserted, and they slipped back into the TARDIS without being seen. The Doctor set the controls, and with the usual cacophony, the ship took off.

‘Where was that place?’ Steven asked, bewildered. He and Sara were from times when such studios no longer existed.

‘Your guess is as good as mine,’ she replied. ‘Let’s just hope we never return there!’

A short while later, Steven had showered and changed his clothes. It felt good to return to the control room without leaving a trail of food as he walked. Sara, still looking fresh, was relaxing in a tall-backed chair there. A moment later, the Doctor entered the room, carrying a tray with three goblets on it. They were wrought silver, very ornate, and steaming slightly. ‘Here we are!’ he announced, cheerily.

‘What’s this?’ Steven asked, wondering if the Doctor was trying to make up for having hit him with the pie.

‘Well,’ the Doctor answered, extending the tray to Sara first, then to Steven, so that they could take a goblet each.

‘We don’t often get a chance to celebrate, but this time we must. Mulled wine’

‘Celebrate?’ asked Sara blankly.

‘Yes.’ The Doctor chuckled. ‘Don’t you recall? When we landed at the police station, it was all decked out for Christmas!’

Steven grinned. ‘So it was.’

The Doctor put down the tray, and took the remaining goblet, which he raised. ‘So, then – a toast! A happy Christmas to as all!’

Smiling, Sara and Steven clinked their goblets with his, and echoed the sentiment. The wine warmed their throats, but the warmth in their hearts came from other causes.

4

Failure

Two thousand years in the future and half a Galaxy away, the planet Kembel was a reluctant host to a spearhead of the Dalek fleet poised to invade the Galaxy. By the year AD 4000, the area controlled by Earth and its allies occupied a good slice of the home Galaxy. The Daleks had subdued their own systems, and were now reaching out once again for the planets owned by the human race.

Knowing full well that they could never defeat the forces of Earth and its allies alone, the Daleks had formed an Alliance with the various ruling powers of the outer galaxies. Together, they were more than a match – it was believed – for the forces of humanity. To ensure their victory, the Daleks had assembled a weapon of their own design, the Time Destructor.

The central mechanism for this device was housed at the moment within a laboratory in the Dalek city constructed on the surface of Kembel. The weapon itself was designed to be portable, but was currently undergoing the final phases of its testing before its power would be unleashed against the Earth itself. Computer banks, scanned by monitor Daleks, lined the room. The Time Destructor was housed in a harness, suspended in front of a glass cubicle. It looked like a large, glass-encased cannon.

At the far end of the weapon was a complex of wiring, and a tube – the housing for the Taranium core that powered the device.

Outside the testing area, separated by low barriers to show the safe zone, stood three of the representatives from the Dalek Alliance. Trantis was a small, wizened humanoid creature with wild hair and facial tendrils that hung down untidily. They were empathic sensors that enabled natives of his world to communicate with one another emotionally. Celation was a tall creature, which breathed the oxygen-rich air with difficulty, giving his speech a throaty, disjointed effect.

The final member of the trio was peefectly human. He was tall and held himself with dignity. His face showed age, but of an indeterminate nature. His hair and neat beard were white, his eyes a piercing blue that showed a keen mind, observing all. The man was Mavic Chen, elected Guardian of the Solar System, and the traitor who had sold out the human race to the Daleks in the hope of increasing his own personal power.

Two Dalek scientists were putting the finishing touches to the mechanisms of the Time Destructor, under the watchful lens of the Black Dalek. As they began to insert the Taranium core that was to power the device, the Black Dalek spun its head-section to face another subordinate Dalek.

‘Advise the Dalek Prime on Skaro that the Taranium core for the Time Destructor has been recovered. The invasion count-down has been resumed. A detailed report will follow.’

‘I obey!’ The Dalek moved off, heading for the communications section. The Black Dalek turned its full attention back on to the weapon itself. The two scientists had finished inserting the core, and were now completing the powering up of the device.

Celation turned to Mavic Chen with what passed for a smile on his face. ‘Having had your contribution to the great weapon stolen,’ he wheezed, ‘it must be a relief to you now that the Daleks have recovered it.’

Chen glared at him coldly. ‘Without my help, it is unlikely they’d have got it back.’

Trantis twisted to face him, glowering angrily. He had not forgotten how Chen had attempted to place the blame for the theft onto him. ‘Your story that it was my people from Trantis who stole the core has been discredited,’ he sneered.

Unaware of the political struggle under way between Trantis and Chen, Celation innocently added: ‘Yes. The thieves were from the Earth, I believe?’

‘Only two of them,’ Chen snapped back. ‘And they were under the influence of a creature from another galaxy.’

‘Indeed?’ Trantis purred. ‘He *looked* like an Earth creature.’

‘That was only a disguise,’ Mavic Chen said. He hated having to explain himself away; it lowered his influence over these peasants. ‘The Daleks know of him. He is some kind of a time and space-traveller, known only as the Doctor.’

‘Then he is nothing to do with me!’ Trantis exclaimed self-righteously. ‘My people have not yet conquered the dimension of time.’

Chen couldn’t resist a dig. ‘No – but I hear that your experiments in that field are progressing, Trantis. Just how far have they gone, um?’

Furious, Trantis snapped: ‘We have not yet completed...’ Abruptly, he was aware that Chen was taunting him to get further information, and he caught his temper. ‘Only the Daleks know how to penetrate the time barrier,’ he finished.

‘And this other creature,’ Celation added, tactlessly,

‘from wherever he comes.’

‘He’s of noimportance now,’ Chen said, tiring of the bickering. ‘After all, we are here as witnesses to the testing of the Time Destructor, are we not?’

Their eyes turned to the weapon, now glowing with power. The Dalek technicians, under the guidance of the two scientists, were feeding energy into the device.

‘At last!’ Chen crowed. ‘The Time Destructor is finally being activated!’ And soon, he reflected silently, it would belong solely to him. When he had departed from the Earth, he had given his assistant, Karlton, instructions to assemble a fleet ready to strike. When the Dalek task force thrust for the Earth, Karlton and his small group would arrive here. Under Chen’s direction, they would smash the small Dalek force guarding Kembel, and then seize control of the Time Destructor. The first planet it would be used on would not be the Earth, but Skaro

Celation sighed. ‘If only we could join the war force –

and see its power for ourselves.’

Chen smiled inwardly. Celation would indeed witness its power – when it was turned on his home world! Trantis rudely interrupted Chen’s pleasant thoughts of death and annihilation.

‘What *is* its power?’ he snapped, annoyed at being kept out of the secret.

Celation inclined his head slightly. ‘If your galaxy had assisted in its manufacture – as ours have – you would have no need to ask.’

Tritons scowled. ‘We supplied what was asked of us.’

‘Metals! Materials!’ Celation scoffed. ‘We could have taken those from you – *without* your co-operation.’

‘Gentlebeings, please!’ Mavic Chen said, smoothly, putting an arm about each of their shoulders. ‘We are all full partners of the Daleks, are we not? There is surely no need for us to argue amongst ourselves! Especially now, as all that we have planned is finally being put into operation.’

Celation nodded, and even Trantis looked less surly at this thought. Smiling, Chen added: ‘The Time Destructor, my friend, has the ability to plunge a portion of space either forward or backward in time. It can

be a small area –

say, the size of a person – or a large area, even the size of a planet.'

'How?' demanded Trantis.

Chen spread his hands wide. 'Only the Daleks know *that*. But when it *is* used, our enemies will be plunged back through time, degenerating into creatures that first evolved from the filthiest of swamps – or else hurled forward so far in time that their bodies will crumble to thin, lifeless dust!'

Sara was still shaking when she splashed water on her face and dressed. The nightmare had been back. stronger than ever. Bret had been there, accusing her silently, his eyes streaming with tears as she had shot him down once again, and watched him die... As she walked through the corridors to the TARDIS control room, Sara knew that in one sense at least, she was being haunted.

It wasn't that she believed in ghosts, exactly. Bret was dead, and there was nothing she could do about that. But he still lived in her memory, and she knew that it was there that he haunted her. No matter what rhetoric the Doctor employed to try to convince her that she had had no choice in killing Bret, *she* knew better. It was her fault, and hers alone, that her brother was dead. His memory would never leave her, but she could in one way atone to his memory-ghost.

By finishing the mission that he had begun.

As always, the Doctor was in the control room when she arrived. He had been reading a thick volume in some indecipherable script when she entered. Glancing up, he carefully marked his place, and laid the book down. He tucked his reading glasses away in his pocket, and crossed to greet her. 'The dream again?' he asked, perceptively.

She nodded. 'Doctor, we must return to Kembel. I have to be certain that Bret's sacrifice was not in vain, and that we really did stop the Daleks and Mavic Chen.'

The Doctor sighed, and placed a hand gently on her arm. 'Child,' he said softly, 'what you ask is impossible.

Oh, I know the codes and the information, but I do not possess the ability.' He stared off into the distance. 'I have been expecting that request for a long time,' he confessed.

‘I have all the figures and calculations safely stored away.’

He tapped the side of his head. ‘If the TARDIS were in full operational order. I could steer us to Kembel in the right time frame. But, sadly, this old ship of mine is a trifle worn out. One vital component is broken beyond repair.’

‘Isn’t there a way to replace it" Sara was touched by the fact that the Doctor had been attempting to get them back to Kembel.

‘I’m afraid not, my dear. None of the worlds I have ever visited has ever had the technology for me to make a new circuit for the time-path co-ordinator.’

‘But... surely on your own world...’

He held up a hand. ‘On my world,’ he said, firmly. ‘all manner of things are possible. But we cannot go there.

Certainly not without the circuit that the TARDIS

requires.’ And for other reasons, he added to himself. Such a journey would be appealing – were there not other factors to consider. ‘No, Sara, I’m sorry – but there is absolutely no way that I know of to return us to the planet Kembel.

You must live with that.’

Sara turned her haunted eyes on to him. The Doctor shuddered at the expression of terrible loss that he could read within them. Whatever would become of this poor, tortured soul?

The two scientist Daleks moved to join the Black Dalek.

The Time Destructor was now glowing and pulsing with the power passing through it. ‘The Destructor is now armed,’ the first stated.

‘All that is now required,’ the second added, is a subject.’

The Black Dalek’s eye section swung round. ‘The subject has been selected’ Its eye-stick was focused on one of the aliens present. ‘Use Trantis.’

‘No!’ Trantis yelled in horror, glancing wildly around.

There was no escape from the room. The two scientist Daleks moved forward, thrusting their arm-sticks at him.

‘No!’ Trantis screamed again, as they herded him back towards the booth in font of the Time Destructor. ‘You can’t! You can’t! I’m your partner,’ he pleaded. ‘I’m your friend. We made a pact, a bargain. You need me for your conquest! Take one of the others! *Take one of them!* ’

The Daleks didn’t bother to reply. They simply pushed him back until he stumbled into the booth, and then closed the door on him, cutting off his screams.

Celation looked in fear at the amused face of Mavic Chen. ‘Why was Trantis selected?’ he wheezed.

Chen shook his head in mock pity. ‘It was his own fault, really.’

‘What do you mean’?’

‘He was *so* eager to make a contribution to the Time Destructor that the Daleks decided to let him make one.’

Chen smiled, this time with genuine pleasure. ‘His life.’

The Black Dalek had watched the proceedings impassively. The scientists moved back to the controls again. Trantis was still screaming silently within the booth, but the Black Dalek ignored that. ‘Prepare to activate the Time Destructor.’

The first scientist looked over towards Chen and Celation. ‘Are the other two creatures to be present at the activation?’

‘Yes.’ The Black Dalek stared at them carefully. ‘Their greed for power is so great and so transparent that they can be trusted. Start the Time Destructor.’

‘I obey.’ The Dalek moved to the controls, and completed the powering up of the weapon. It began to pulse with rhythmic bursts of light. Staring into the barrel of the device, Trantis sank to his knees, horrified. Then the pulsing began to slow, and a look of intense relief crossed Trantis’s face as he realized that he was still alive.

Celation stepped forward, his face a web of conflicting emotions. ‘It doesn’t work!’ he howled. ‘It doesn’t work!’

‘Impossible!’ Chen hissed. ‘It *must* work! It must!’ If the Daleks had miscalculated in their construction of the machine, then all his plans for conquest would crumble into nothing.

The first scientist reported the obvious to the Black Dalek: 'The Destructor is having no effect.'

'The mechanism is functioning perfectly,' the second added. 'The fault shows to be in the Taranium core.'

Chen was stunned. 'There must be an error!' he protested.

The Black Dalek's eye fixed on him. 'Daleks do not make errors,' it grated. 'You have tried to deceive us. You have lied.'

'That isn't true!' Chen retorted. 'Why should I lie? l can only benefit from my alliance with you. I brought you Taranium!'

'If this is the core that you brought us,' the Black Dalek stated, 'it failed to activate the Time Destructor. It does not contain Taranium' It spun to the scientists. 'Eliminate him!'

The two guns came up, but Chen had seized on what the Black Dalek had said. 'It must have been the old man! Of course! Don't you see? While he had the core in his possession, he must have switched the Taranium for something else!' The Daleks looked at one another, well aware that what he said made sense. Growing in confidence, Chen continued: 'He tricked you – that is why he insisted on escape the way he did! If you find him, you will find the means to repair the Time Destructor.'

Celation frowned. 'But it was you who took the core from him.'

'I know,' Chen agreed. 'But I didn't check it. How could I?' He gestured towards the Daleks. ' *They* should have checked it – and didn't!'

The Black Dalek ignored his own orders about killing Chen. If the Doctor did have the core, then Chen might still prove useful for now. 'Report to Skaro,' it ordered the first scientist. 'They are to send a time machine here to Kembel immediately. The Taranium core must be recovered.'

'Time machine?' echoed Chen. 'But you need Taranium to power that – and you have none! That was why you needed my contribution!'

The Black Dalek faced him. 'The Daleks need no one!

Your assistance in procuring the Taranium was useful, but there are other sources. We have enough Taranium ourselves to power a single

time ship.'

'You didn't tell us this earlier.'

'You will be told what you need to know' The Black Dalek turned to Celation. 'Return to your quarters. Remain there until we give you further instructions.' Celation nodded and left, glad to be away from this place. The Black Dalek resumed to Chen. 'You will wait here for the arrival of the time machine.'

The second scientist indicated the booth containing Trantis. 'What shall we do with the test subject?'

'He is of no use to us now. Exterminate him!'

The scientist moved off, and triggered the booth door. It opened, and Trantis sprang to his feet, blubbering with happiness. He had not been able to hear his sentence pronounced through the glass, and assumed that he was to be freed. Instead. the Dalek's gun fired. Trantis gave one final scream, and sank to the floor.

The Black Dalek looked straight at Mavic Chen. 'So die all who fail the Daleks. Do not forget that!'

The mood in the control room was far from happy. When Steven had arrived, he had found Sara staring off into nothing, and the Doctor sitting in the tall-backed chair, apparently intent upon a book in his lap. It wasn't until about ten silent minutes later that Steven observed that the Doctor wasn't turning the pages.

Suddenly, there came a loud bleeping sound from the console, causing them all to jump. The Doctor dropped his book and dashed to the panel. One indicator was lit, and pulsing away in time with the sound.

'What is that?' Steven asked.

'The time path indicator; the Doctor said, crossly.

'Don't you remember that it registered when the Daleks were chasing us...' His voice trailed off. 'Of course, of course – you joined the ship *after* I had fixed their time machine. Well, this warning device lets me know when another ship is on exactly the same path through time and space that we are travelling.'

'Could it be a coincidence?' Sara asked.

The Doctor shook his head. ‘With all of space and time to select from, what are the chances that another ship would be on the exact same flight-path that we are on?

Infinitesimal, my dear, that’s what. No, there is another ship out there, following us. ’

‘The Daleks’ she asked.

‘I can’t think of anyone else that it could be.’

Their eyes were all fixed on the bleeping indicator, when Steven noticed something else. The time rotor was slowing down, and that could mean only one thing: ‘We’re landing,’ he announced.

The three of them stared at the panel, wondering where the ship had brought them now – and how long it would be before the Daleks arrived to hunt them down...

5

Volcano

The day was not going well for the English forces. They had less than an hour to win, strike back and carry the day.

Everything came down to the battle on this field, this day.

Unless the English Captain could somehow rally his forces and strike hard, they would be defeated. The Ashes would go to Australia once again.

The match was not the most exciting, and even the two BBC commentators in their box were showing signs of the strain. In flat, clipped tones, they commented on the action

– or rather, the lack of it – in the final test from the Oval. It had been one of the slowest day’s cricket that either Trevor or Scott had ever witnessed.

‘Well, the English batsmen are really fighting against the clock now, Scott,’ observed Trevor.

‘My. word, yes,’ Scott said m his thick Australian accent. ‘They need seventy-eight runs in forty-five minutes to win.’

‘And what was it? Twenty-nine they scored in the last hour? Well,

they'll have to do better than that. It really has been an exciting game, hasn't it, Scott?'

' *Very* exciting, Trevor,' lied Scott. It was, after all, their job to keep the viewers happy at home. If they were still awake, or hadn't switched to ITV.

'Well, let's have another look at the scoreboard, shall we?' Trevor asked, rhetorically. 'For the benefit of any viewers who've just joined us.' The camera obediently panned to the scoreboard, showing the dire situation that the English team were in. 'There, that gives the position.

You'll see that...' He broke off. With a wheezing, groaning sound, the TARDIS materialized. 'Goodness me, Scott,' he continued, in the same unexcited voice, 'take a look at that.'

'Look at what, Trevor?' Scott asked, scanning the field for some sign of a four or six being hit.

'There's a police telephone has on the pitch.'

'My word,' Scott replied, 'so there is.' The camera panned to show the intruder. 'There it is, Trevor, on the monitor now.'

'Yes, Scott. It really is *extraordinary*. I don't remember anything like this happening before. Do you?'

'No, I don't think I do.'

'Well, Ross is looking through the record books. If there *has* been anything like this, he'll find it for us. Well, well.'

'You, know, Trevor,' Scott continued, 'this does put a new light on the game.'

'What light's that, Scott?'

The camera showed the game having come to a complete halt while the players stood around, chatting and occasionally looking towards the police has that had stopped play. Nobody seemed terribly concerned about where it had come from.

'Well,' Scott said, in the same flat voice, 'I know the ground staff here are excellent, but even assuming that they got rid of it in, say, ten minutes – England would then be faced with getting their seventy-

eight runs in... thirty-five minutes.'

'Yes, Scott, you're right. Well, I think we can say this has been a bad break for England.'

'A *very* had break, Trevor – especially as the weather's been holding off so welt'

'Yes, it has, hasn't it? Been holding off *remarkably* well.'

At that moment, the TARDIS started to moan and wheeze again.

'Well,' Trevor continued, 'here's another look at the board – although there's not been much happening here for the last few minutes.'

'It's gone again, Trevor.'

'What's that, Scott?'

'The police box has gone again.'

'Yes, so it has,' Trevor agreed. 'Well, that wasn't too much of a delay, was it?'

'About two and a half minutes, I made it, Trevor.'

'Yes, well, there's the situation. England now needs seventy-eight runs in forty-two and a half minutes to win.

They really have to go some now, don't they, Scott?'

'Yes, Trevor, they do. I think we may yet see some action here at the Oval today.'

The Doctor hunched over the controls, checking that the TARDIS computers had had the time to reset themselves properly in their brief pause. He hated taking off so soon again, but had really been faced with little choice in the matter. 'Definitely some sporting ocassion,' he commented.

He couldn't chance facing the Daleks in such a crowded place. The Daleks would create utter havoc and slaughter there.

Sara considered the scene that they had witnessed on the scanner – people dressed in white, standing around doing nothing. 'I hardly think to, Doctor,' she disagreed.

‘Was it Earth, do you think?’ Steven asked.

‘Possibly, yes, possibly.’ While he was trying to take a pair of companions back to their home on Earth in the 1960s, the Doctor had managed to get the TARDIS in some kind of pattern that tended now to make the Earth in that period one of the more frequent landing spots. He wished he could figure out how he had managed that – and undo the damage. It was getting terribly dull to be constantly turning up at the same time and place – give or take a few years and a few thousand miles – all the time.

Sara looked grimly at the time-path indicator, which was still bleeping away. ‘Well,’ she observed practically,

‘wherever we were, whoever is following us wasn’t thrown off by that landing.’

‘Not only that,’ the Doctor added. ‘They are closing in on us fast!’

The activity in the laboratory on Kembel halted as a slight, whispering noise began to grow. In the centre of the room, the air puckered, and suddenly a featureless silver-grey cube materialized. After a second, a door opened, and a Dalek – painted a distinctive red – emerged. It glanced around, and then glided across to where the Black Dalek and Mavic Chen stood.

‘By order of the Dalek Prime; the Red Dalek announced, ‘the time machine is at your disposal.’

‘Understood. Preparations for the journey will be made at once.’ The Black Dalek’s eye-stick swivelled to face its second in command. ‘Organize a task force for the pursuit of the Doctor and his companions.’

‘I obey.’ The Dalek moved off to the communications area, to gather in a security team for the assignment.

The Black Dalek spun to face the first scientist. ‘Operate the tracking instruments within the time-machine.

Discover the space and time-path being taken by the enemy time-travellers.’ The first scientist acknowledged, and then entered the time-machine. Finally, the Black Dalek turned to Chen. ‘Mavic Chen, you will accompany the task-force. You will ensure that the Taranium core is returned to Kembel.’

‘Of course,’ Chen replied, smoothly. ‘I shall do everything in my power...’

‘If you fail,’ the Black Dalek interrupted him, ‘or if we find that you have deceived us – you will be eliminated.’

Chen inclined his head slightly. ‘Understood.’

The first scientist moved into sight at the entrance to the time-machine. ‘The enemy time-travellers are approaching the planet Tigus.’

The Black Dalek turned to the Red Dalek. ‘As soon as the task-force is assembled, you will leave. The Taranium core is to be recovered and the time-travellers are to be eliminated. If Mavic Chen shows any signs of treachery or weakness – exterminate him also.’

Chen turned his cold eyes onto the time-machine. It was his last chance to gain control of the Time Destructor.

They had to find the Doctor again – and wrest the core from him. He had to have the power that it represented –

he had to!

*

The TARDIS had landed again, and the view on the scanner was both appealing and appalling. Appealing, because there were no people about to be harmed if the Daleks should arrive. Appalling, because the planet lacked any signs of life – and exhibited many signs of potential death.

The sky was blood-red, a uniform, dull colour. No clouds were visible, and the redness hung over the planet, transforming it into a picture of the realms of Hell. The surface was warped and rocky, with steaming fissures. In the distance, clouds of smoke and steam gave mute evidence of immense volcanic activities. All about the TARDIS were lava beds. They looked as though they were relatively fresh. Dull flashes of light broke through the sky from time to time.

‘Where are we, Doctor?’ Sara whispered, intimidated by the grim nature of this world. ‘Do you know?’

The Doctor simply shook his head. It could be anywhere. There was nothing to distinguish this place from a billion other raw worlds,

heaving through the strains of volcanism.

‘It doesn’t look very pleasant,’ Steven commented.

‘We’ll take off again as soon as the TARDIS computers have realigned themselves,’ the Doctor decided. This world was a dangerous place to wait – anything could happen in a half-hour here, from an earthquake to the continent sinking into some primeval sea.

At that second, the insistent bleeping of the time-path indicator stopped. They all turned to look at it. Finally, Steven asked: ‘Have we lost them?’

‘Lost?’ the Doctor repeated, then shook his head. ‘No –

whoever was following as has landed, landed out there somewhere.’

Their eyes turned to look at the picture of burning desolation on the scanner.

On the surface of Tigus, rocks tended to be a temporary phenomenon. They might melt in the incredible heat of a volcano, or he carried along in the next lava river. They could vanish into chasms created by earthquakes. They did not, however, normally materialize from nowhere, as a largish rock had apparently just done. After a moment, two doors in the ‘rock’ swung open, and a figure emerged.

He was whistling rather tunelessly, and was dressed in the robes of a mendicant monk, untidily held in place by a faded rope, knotted together at the waist. In his hands he held a pair of binoculars, which he used to scan the horizon. To his immense satisfaction, he caught sight of the TARDIS almost immediately. His rotund face was split by a big grin that soon developed into an almost insane chuckle.

Revenge, at last!

A short while later, after a brief but strenuous argument, the Doctor led his two companions gingerly over the unsafe surface of the planet, glancing around all the time as he did so.

Steven, as ever, was grumbling. ‘You know, Doctor, it would help if we knew what we were looking for.’

‘I still think it was madness to come out here,’ Sara added. ‘We should have taken off again.’

The Doctor looked at them both, sharply. ‘What good would it do to run away, mm? If we’re being pursued, the sooner we find out who it is – the better!’ He stared about the landscape thoughtfully. ‘This isn’t like the Daleks at all

– they’d have been haring all over by now...’

Steven had had enough, and moved to sit down on a rock. ‘Hey,’ he exclaimed, ‘this rock is still hot!’

‘Yes, of course.’ The Doctor patted his arm. ‘This is a young planet, my boy, still cooling down and filled with the fires and impetuosity of youth! Fascinating, utterly fascinating. I do wish we had the time to explore, but there are urgent matters to settle.’ He shook his head. ‘Now, who else would take all that time and trouble to follow us?’

He was lost in his musings. Steven started to look around for a cooler rock to sit on. Sara shook her head.

‘Are we going to stay here for ever?’

‘I hope not,’ Steven answered, looking at the sheer desolation all around. There wasn’t even a sign of life – or any kind of comfort.

‘Yes, and so do I,’ the Doctor agreed. He was smiling, having finally realized who might be on their trail.

‘However, I don’t think that will be necessary. And, what is more, I think our shadow will soon show himself. Yes, very soon.’

‘You sound as if you know what’s going on,’ Steven commented.

‘Do I?’ The Doctor chuckled happily to himself. ‘Well, there is a possibility – unlikely, perhaps, but *possible*.’ He chuckled again to himself. Who else could it be?

The robed figure had neatly avoided being seen by the Doctor’s small party, and had now arrived at the TARDIS.

He kicked at it with his sandalled foot, then winced with pain. ‘To work, to work,’ he muttered, and set down the battered leather bag he had been carrying. Opening it, he extracted a pair of dark goggles, which he fitted over his eyes. This was a mistake, because they rendered him as blind as a bat. Muttering to himself, he shoved them up on his forehead, then rummaged in the bag again for his laser pencil.

He returned his attention to the TARDIS lock. He almost forgot to pull the gaggles down again, but caught himself just in time. He didn't want to blind himself doing this little trick, after all. Goggles firmly in place, he triggered the laser. Thanks to the filters in the goggles, he could see quite plainly, and he turned the thin beam from the laser on to the TARDIS lock. His manipulations took just a few seconds, then he switched off the laser pencil.

Everything went black again, and he whipped off the goggles. He dumped them and the pencil into his bag and snapped it that before turning his attention back to the lock for a moment.

A broad grin of satisfaction crossed his face. *That had fixed him!* He patted the TARDIS, gathered up his bag, and set off back to his own TARDIS.

'Hello! Hello there!' the Doctor called, cheerfully enough.

'Don't you think we should meet and talk this over?' There was no reply.

'Who are you expecting?' Steven asked, exasperated.

This place was getting on his nerves. Another volcano belched in the distance, sending up a plume of smoke, a small jet of flames and a loud rumbling.

'You'll see, you'll see,' the Doctor chuckled.

'Come off it,' Steven answered. 'I wasn't born yesterday, you know. Tell me now – otherwise whoever it is, you'll say it's the person you were expecting.' When the Doctor didn't reply, he added: 'You're cheating.' The Doctor just snorted.

It was Sara who first spotted their visitor, as he came into sight on a nearby pile of rocks. She yelled and pointed.

The Doctor was not at all surprised to see the Meddling Monk again. He and Steven had met him once before. The Monk was from the Doctor's home world, and possessed a more sophisticated TARDIS than the Doctor had – though the Doctor refused to admit to that. It still had functional chameleon circuits, for example, and that had been the clue that the Doctor had picked up. He knew that the time-machine that had followed them must be around this spot, but since it wasn't visible, it must be disguised somehow.

The Monk waved, his cherubic face split by a broad grin. ‘Hello there, Doctor. Keeping well?’

‘Can’t complain,’ the Doctor replied, sociably, as if this were a casual meeting over afternoon tea. ‘And you?’

‘Oh, so-so, you know. So-so.’

Sara glared at Steven, whose face showed a mixture of recognition and irritation. ‘Who is that?’ she hissed.

Steven just shushed her.

The Monk nodded at Steven. ‘I’m delighted to see you again, young man.’

‘Thanks,’ replied Steven, drily. ‘I wish I could say the same.’

‘I suppose congratulations are in order,’ the Doctor observed to his compatriot. ‘For your escape.’ The Doctor had stumbled accidentally on the Monk in England in AD

1066, where he was attempting to change history and defeat the invading forces of William the Conqueror. Like the Doctor, the Monk had a fascination for Earth history.

Unlike the Doctor, he wanted to tinker and interfere, and try to remake it along the lines that he felt would be better.

The Doctor had nipped his plans in the bud, and then stranded the Monk in that era by removing the dimensional stabilizer from his TARDIS. Since the time-ship had been disguised as a stone sarcophagus, the interior had shrunk down to a doll’s-house version of the control room to fill the smaller space available to it.

The Monk looked smug at this comment. ‘Pretty good, wasn’t it?’ he said, without modesty. ‘Took me a little time, of course, but then I hit upon the solution. I managed to visually link the circuits of the dimensional integrator through the scanner linkages, and create a temporary stabilizer. Than I could get into my ship and replace the unit. Simple, but innovative, don’t you think?’

The Doctor inclined his head. ‘Mm, an interesting solution indeed – and very elegant. Something I might have done myself. But I would think it would make for a bit of an uncomfortable time.’

‘You’re right, Doctor,’ the Monk agreed. ‘But one can’t have everything.’ His tone of philosophical resignation changed to one of sly cunning. ‘It’s better than being stuck in 1066, though.’

‘Yes, I imagine it would be.’

Sara was tired of the incessant prattling. She turned to Steven. ‘What’s he talking about? 1066?’

‘We’ve met the Monk before,’ Steven answered softly.

‘I’ll explain later. Just listen for the moment – he’s up to something.’

The Doctor gripped his lapels, and frowned up at the Monk, who was hopping back and forth from foot to foot in his attempt to control his excitement. ‘I take it that it’s the obvious reason that brought you here?’

‘I’m afraid so, Doctor,’ the Monk said, apparently a trifle ashamed of this. Then he brightened up again.

‘Revenge is a strange emotion, isn’t it?’

‘Indeed. I thought – well, I *hoped* that you might have risen above it. Ignored the temptation.’ He looked at the Monk without much hope of that eventuality.

‘I tried, Doctor, really I tried’ The Monk started to chuckle. ‘But I failed. Oh, I know it’s childish, but I do want my own back’

‘I see.’ The Doctor raised an eyebrow. ‘Any plans?’

The Monk rubbed his hands together, gleefully. ‘And all carried out! Yes! You left me in 1066,’ he laughed, tears rolling down his face. ‘Now I’ve marooned you – on the planet Tigus!’ He was almost falling about laughing as he waved, encompassing the terrible landscape. ‘Sorry I keep laughing,’ he said, between gales of merriment, ‘but it’s *so* difficult to control it!’

‘It must be,’ the Doctor observed, drily.

The Monk waved again. ‘Goodbye, Doctor.’ Picking up his bag, he shot out of sight. His voice came back to them:

‘Perhaps I’ll return and rescue you one day!’

Steven ran over to where the Monk had been standing, but there was

sign of the elusive figure. ‘He’s gone,’ he announced, glumly. ‘We’ve got to find him.’

‘It’s much more important that we find out what he’s done to the TARDIS,’ the Doctor snapped. ‘He won’t leave here until he’s sure we’re trapped, and he’s had another chance to gloat. He’s so childish. Come on!’

The three of them dashed back as fast as they could to the TARDIS, which stood where they had left it. Steven had arrived first, and had looked all around it by the time that the Doctor had arrived last, puffing and wheezing.

‘It looks all right,’ Steven said, doubtfully.

‘So did the Monk’s sarcophagus when we left it,’ the Doctor minded him. He began to examine the ship very carefully for signs of interference.

‘You locked the doors when we left, didn’t you?’ Sara asked.

‘Of course I did!’ the Doctor snapped. ‘Whatever he’s done, he couldn’t have got inside.’ Pulling the TARDIS

key from out of his pocket, the Doctor moved to put it into the lock.

It slipped away. Puzzled, he tried again, and again the key refused to enter the lock. The Doctor went down on to one knee and peered into the mechanism. Then he straightened up, a serious expression on his face.

‘He’s jammed the locking mechanism,’ he explained.

‘The TARDIS lock has several dozen potential combinations, and will only open to my key or one of the duplicates I’ve made. It’s a matter of light refraction.

Somehow, the Monk has made all combinations of the lock invalid...’

‘So we’re locked out,’ finished Sara.

‘Yes,’ the Doctor agreed, slowly. ‘We’re locked out.’

Steven looked out over the red-hued surface of Tigus.

‘Then we’re marooned,’ he said, hollowly. Doomed to remain on this volcanic world until the Monk’s appetite for revenge had been sated –

if they could live that long.

The Monk was watching all of this from a nearby pile of rubble. He was holding his mouth with one hand, his stomach with the other, and was racked with bouts of silent laughter. This was rich, far richer than he had anticipated!

Steven finished his line of thought. ‘If the Daleks do come after us...’

‘We’ll be at their mercy,’ Sara concluded, grimly.

The Red Dalek joined the Black Dalek in the laboratory.

‘The task-force will shortly be aboard the time-machine.’

‘There most be no delay.’ the Black Dalek replied. ‘As soon as the force is aboard the time-machine, follow the time-travellers. Annihilate them.’

Mavic Chen moved to join them. ‘Where are they now?’

The Red Dalek replied: ‘Still on the planet Tigus.’

Sara and Steven were hammering away at the TARDIS

lock with small rocks, without any success. The Doctor had been thinking, and finally moved to push them roughly aside. ‘You’ll achieve nothing like that,’ he told them. ‘Nothing! As if brute force could affect the lock of the TARDIS!’

‘Perhaps not; said Sara. hotly, ‘but it’s better than simply accepting exile as our fate.’

‘Like you feel I have, umm?’

‘Well, you haven’t been taking much interest, have you?’ Steven answered.

‘And why? The Doctor raised his eyebrows, and poked a finger into Steven’s chest. ‘Why? I’ll tell you why – because I’ve been letting my brains solve the problem, not brute force. Now – stand back, both of you.’

‘Can you open it?’ Sara asked, eagerly.

‘I shall be able to answer that question in a few moments.’ He took off his large ruby ring, and held it to the door lock. From his inside

pocket, he took his small pencil torch. Setting it to its highest power, he shone the light through the crystal in his ring, and focused it on the door lock. The beam played about for a moment, and then he snapped it off, and slipped the ring back on to his finger.

'Nothing's happened,' Sara said, bitterly.

The Doctor glared at her coldly, then produced his key.

This time, it slid into the lock and turned with ease.

Pushing the door open, he gestured for them to precede him. Steven halted in the doorway and smiled.

'Doctor, you're a genius'

'Yes, my boy, I know. I know.' The Doctor followed his friends into the TARDIS, and closed the doors behind him.

The Monk was still hidden behind the rocks, trying to stifle his laughter, and unaware of what had happened. He was wondering how long he'd leave the Doctor to suffer when he heard a very familiar noise – unbalanced dematerialization circuits. He shot around the rock in time to see the TARDIS fade away. His face fell, and then he stamped his foot, petulantly.

'Don't think I'm going to leave it at this!' he yelled at the universe in general. 'You haven't heard the last of me!

You haven't heard the last of me!'

'If you ask me; Steven observed, 'we haven't heard the last of the Monk.'

'Quite so,' agreed the Doctor, hovering over the controls. 'Hell be on our trail just as fast as he can.'

'But this time, we'll be expecting him,' Sara said, significantly.

Exactly, my dear.'

'At the risk of sounding stupid,' Steven interrupted,

'just how *did* you get as back into the TARDIS?'

'Don't worry about sounding stupid,' the Doctor answered, patting his ann. 'You can't help it. Make yourself useful and keep an eye on the

time-path indicator.

We must know how far behind as he is. As to how I broke his trap – why, he gave me the clue himself, unwittingly.

Optics! He boasted that that was how he'd got out of our little trap, so when I realized he'd frozen our lock somehow, I knew he'd have done it with optics – his childish mind likes things like that. All I had to do was to break his delicate adjustments with a little interference of my own.'

'What do you mean?' Steven asked.

'Well, he used a laser light to set up a force field on the lock. I merely used my ruby ring and torch to create a low-power laser of my own. It set up interference patterns in his field, thus cancelling it. Simplicity itself.'

'Yes, but...' Steven began, but the Doctor cut him short.

'Are you going to be argumentative all day? Kindly be quiet, and let me land the ship. I should very much like to examine the lock and make certain the Monk's little trick hasn't damaged it in any way.'

The TARDIS was landing already. The Doctor had managed to programme in a short hop, and smiled with satisfaction as the ship materialized. He switched on the scanner. Outside, they could see they were in London again. It was night, and they could make out Nelson's Column, which was surrounded by a huge crowd of people, waving and cheering. A peal of bells rang out, and loud cheers as midnight struck. The people began singing:

'Should auld acquaintance...'

'I don't think you'll be able to carry out your repairs here, Doctor,' Steven observed.

'It's some sort of celebration, isn't it?' Sara added.

'Yes,' the Doctor agreed, slowly. 'I've seen something like this before..' He snapped his fingers. 'Of course – the Relief of Mafeking!'

On Kembel, the final Daleks moved into the Dalek time-machine. Mavic Chen and the Red Dalek followed, and the door closed. After a short pause, the air puckered, and with its customary whisper, the time-machine vanished.

The Black Dalek turned to the scientist Dalek. ‘Report to Skaro – the time-machine is on its way. The Taranium core will be recovered, and the Doctor and his companions will be exterminated!’

6

Land of the Pharaohs

The early morning winds stirred the sands fitfully. The sun was ascending, and the desert growing hotter by the minute. The horizon shimmered in the haze of the early day. Though the River Nile was just a short distance away, none of the luxuriant foliage that grew about the mighty river extended this far from its waters. Life in Egypt was the Nile, and the deserts held nothing but death.

Standing as a mute, imposing witness to the reality of death was a huge pyramid. It was almost five hundred feet high and over seven hundred and fifty feet long on each side at its base on the rock below the shifting sands. In time, two more pyramids, both smaller, and a strange, stone creation named the Sphinx would join this pyramid; at this point in time, however, the great pyramid of Khufu

– known to later Greek travellers and posterity as Cheops –

stood alone in the desert, save for its associated buildings.

Around the pyramid was a wall, enclosing the building site. At one side was a small temple, to be used to conduct the funerary services for Khufu when the gods should call him. Small shacks, that once housed the building force of slaves and master architects working on the pyramid, now stood apparently deserted. Slabs of stone and white Tura limestone had been left abandoned. The place looked already dead.

Almost two and a half million stone blocks had been used to construct this incredible edifice, and each stone had weighed from two and a half to fifteen tons. The finished pyramid was enclosed in a facing of the limestone, and the white surface polished until it gleamed, reflecting the diffuse rays of the sun at any observer.

Save for the occasional cries of the cranes from the Nile, however, the stillness of the tomb already lay upon the site.

Then, shattering the stillness for a few seconds, the TARDIS materialized just inside the wall.

‘The travellers have landed,’ the technician Dalek reported to the Red Dalek. The screens within the Dalek time-machine had tracked the TARDIS into its landing, and their own vessel was on the same course through the space-time vortex.

‘Ascertain their position exactly,’ the Red Dalek answered. The technician turned to do so as a third Dalek crossed the large control room to join the Red Dalek.

‘Landing will be achieved shortly,’ it reported.

‘Programming has been completed,’ the technician added. ‘The enemy time-ship will be visible on the Time-Space Scanner.’

The Red Dalek turned its eye-stick to face the circular screen that dominated one of the nearby panels. Its random patterns slowed, and then faded. In their place now appeared an image of the TARDIS. It stood in the desert, alongside numerous objects destined for the Pharaoh’s final resting place – beds of wood and beaten gold, chests, statues and mummified animals.

‘Shall I prepare a task-force?’ the third Dalek asked.

‘No,’ the Red Dalek decided. ‘It is essential that the Taranium core is recaptured intact. Premature annihilation of the humans might lead to its destruction’

At this point, Mavic Chen entered the main control room from the side room that had been assigned to him –

either for his convenience, or as his cell; he was not certain. He crossed to join the Red Dalek, his perpetual smile still hovering about his cruel lips. If he had any doubts as to his safety, none showed on his arrogant face.

The Red Dalek regarded him for a moment before speaking. ‘Mavic Chen, the recovery of the Taranium core is your responsibility.’

‘I welcome it,’ Chen declared. ‘These thieves are of my race, and guile and cunning will succeed where force would fail.’

Uninterested in his speeches, the Red Dalek interrupted. ‘You will be watched. Treachery on your part will be dealt with swiftly.’

Chen attempted a placating smile. ‘When I have completed this mission, you will come to see that I am totally worthy of your trust.’

‘Once the Taranium core is in your possession,’ the Red Dalek continued, unaffected by Chen’s reassurances, ‘then we shall eliminate the fugitives’

‘Yes, of course.’ Chen turned to the scanner and studied it, thoughtfully. ‘I assume that that is where they have landed?’

‘Correct.’ The Red Dalek studied the instrument readings. ‘We shall arrive shortly – in four Earth minutes.’

‘Yes.’ Chen stroked his beard, thoughtfully. ‘It would have been nice to have had complete surprise, but you told me that they have equipment in their ship that tells them when they are being followed’

‘The travellers are making no attempt to resume their journey,’ the Red Dalek noted.

‘That’s very strange.’ Chen was puzzled by this little problem. The Doctor must know he was being followed at this point. ‘Why should they choose to wait and face us?’

The Dalek did not care. The motivations of a humanoid were important – results were all that mattered. In four were minutes, they would arrive...

The Doctor was working away at the lock of the TARDIS, sing a small tool kit he had set in the open doorway of the time-machine. He was utterly blind to his surroundings, and paid none of the golden ornaments for the pyramid the slightest bit of attention.

Steven wandered out from the TARDIS, and squinted off into the distance. ‘Haven’t you finished mending that lock yet?’ he asked. The Doctor gave him a filthy look in reply, which didn’t affect Steven’s cheery disposition at all.

‘The other time-machine’s still registering,’ he added.

‘Mmm,’ the Doctor agreed, trying to ignore the distraction and finish his work. ‘But not for long, I fancy.

That wretched Monk should be landing any time now.’

Steven picked up one of the gold-inlaid boxes, and admired it. The gorgeous blue of the lapis lazuli was dazzling. ‘Quite impressive, isn’t it, Doctor?’ He put down the box, and picked up a painted urn.

‘Yes, I suppose you could say that,’ the Doctor agreed, absently, and then glared at him. ‘Although, since the pyramids are one of the seven wonders of your world, I think *impressive* is something of an understatement.’

Steven just grinned cheekily, and wandered off to look at a few more objects. ‘There’s nobody around,’ he said.

‘Do you suppose they’ve finished it?’

‘I’ve no idea, no idea at all.’ The Doctor continued his work on the lock, striving to ignore the meaningless chatter.

‘They didn’t clean up the place very well, did they?’

Steven surveyed the abandoned blocks and the piled treasures with a disapproving stare.

The Doctor straightened up and pointed the small instrument he had been using at the young astronaut.

‘Young man, you are supposed to be watching the Time-Path Indicator.’

‘Sara’s taken over,’ Steven answered. ‘She’ll let us know when the Monk arrives.’

‘Oh.’ The Doctor glowered at him. ‘That’s still no reason for you to bother me while I’m trying to work!

Make yourself useful, and pass me the distrab.’ He gestured to his toolbox.

Steven picked the first tool out of the top of it and handed it to the Doctor. The Doctor looked at it in disgust, and replaced it, taking out the correct instmment instead and returning to his work.

Still looking around the building site, Steven commented: ‘There’s not all that much cover, is there? If the Monk makes a landing on this side of the pyramid, we should be able to see him whatever his TARDIS disguises itself as.’ After a moment’s silence, he added: ‘Don’t you think so, Doctor?’

‘Yes! Yes! If you say so!’ the Doctor snapped, wishing Steven would just shut up.

Steven looked off, and saw a small ramp of earth on the side of the

pyramid. ‘I think I’ll climb up there,’ he said.

‘It’ll give me a better view.’

When he got no answer from the Doctor, Steven shook his head in amusement, and then headed off towards the ramp. After a moment, the Doctor glanced up.

‘If you really want to watch out for the Monk, you should climb up somewhere higher.’ He abruptly realized that he was alone. ‘Well, perhaps *now* I can get a little peace and quiet to finish my work!’

Inside the Dalek time-machine, the activity had increased.

The moment of landing was approaching, and the systems were being shut down one by one to allow the ship to materialize in exactly the right place and time. The Daleks in the main control room were finishing their adjustments, while Mavic Chen stood by the exit door, impatient to be off. ‘Materialization approaches,’ the technician Dalek announced, adjusting the controls to ensure that they landed a short distance from the Doctor’s time-ship.

The Red Dalek turned to another Dalek. ‘You will escort Mavic Chen until he has recovered the Taranium,’ it instructed. ‘If he shows the slightest signs of betraying us, exterminate him.’

‘I obey.’ The Dalek glided off to join Chen at the door.

‘Arrival!’ the technician announced, as the ship whispered into the normal space-time continuum again, and the flight systems were all closed down.

‘I can see it, Doctor!’ Steven called from his perch on the ramp. ‘I saw it land!’

Sighing at this further interruption, the Doctor straightened up as Sara came out of the TARDIS. Steven ran back to join them both.

‘Whatever was following us has landed,’ Sara reported.

‘It’s here,’ Steven said, puffing slightly. ‘About a quarter of a mile off. You can see it clearly from that ramp over there.’

‘Yes, well, good,’ the Doctor sniffed. ‘Now *if* you will be so kind as to get out of my way...’ He shooed them both off, and returned to his work on the lock.

‘Shouldn’t we take the initiative?’ Steven asked, amazed.

‘Go and meet the Monk?’

‘My dear boy,’ the Doctor snapped, you know perfectly well that I never leave the TARDIS unlocked. It might interest you to know that I’ve been forced to strip down the entire mechanism to repair it.’

Sara frowned. ‘The only person who’d even *want* to get in is this Monk character you’ve told me about,’ she objected. ‘And if we were to get over to his ship fast enough...’

‘You’ll do as I say and wait here!’ the Doctor ordered.

‘Well, how long are you going to be?’ demanded Sara.

‘Young woman, that is entirely beside the point.’

‘Doctor,’ Steven broke in, ‘why do you always have to...’

‘I refuse to discuss it!’ The Doctor waved his hands as if to close the argument, then bent back to his work on the lock. ‘None of us will move from here until I say so. And that is final.’

Sara indicated to Steven with a nod of her head that they should leave. Steven looked towards the Doctor, and Sara raised her eyes to the heavens in mock despair. When Steven showed no evidence of moving, Sara waved slightly, and started off alone. With a last, anguished glance back at the Doctor, Steven followed. He knew that there would be an awful lot said about this later.

The Doctor worked away on the lock, muttering to himself. ‘I think it’s about time that some people remembered that these journeys of mine are for the purpose of scientific discovery! I’m not in the business of giving sight-seeing tours of the Universe, with everyone behaving like a bunch of rowdy tourists and rushing off to look at whatever they wish! I thought that Barbara and that Chesterton fellow were bad enough, but it’s getting worse! *Much* worse’ The Doctor continued muttering under his breath as he laboured on, unaware that he was alone, at least for the moment.

*

Work on the House of Eternity had taken a long time, and Tuthmos had been the Pharaoh’s overseer for all of this.

He had grown old on the project, and was immensely pleased with the way it had turned out. Khephren had designed this new style of architecture, and despite the vast amount of labour it had required to construct, Tuthmos rather thought that it would catch on. The original designs had been modified from time to time by the Pharaoh, as was his right, since his spirit would dwell within this House. Now, though, Khufu lay in his final illness, and all was virtually ready. All that had to be done now was to place the treasures that would accompany the Pharaoh on his journey to meet the gods within the tomb. Tuthmos was taking a final inventory of the items when he spotted the strange blue box – and then the even stranger old man who was bent over it.

Tuthmos was old himself, and not in any shape to accost strangers. Instead, he retreated silently, and then hurried back to the house by the entrance that was Khephren's workshop. It was a rough place, of mud-brick and wattle, since it would be torn down as soon as the pyramid was sealed. Khephren was taking his morning meal with Hyksos, the swarthy captain of the local guards. Both men looked up in considerable surprise from their bowls as Tuthmos uncharacteristically rushed into the room.

Gesturing outside, the overseer gasped: 'Strangers – at the tomb!'

Steven and Sara soon reached the vicinity of the other time-machine, which simply sat in the sands. It was a featureless box, some ten feet to a side, which puzzled Steven.

'It hasn't worked this time, has it?' he muttered.

'What hasn't?' Sara asked. She was getting a little tired of these shared secrets Steven and the Doctor had about the Monk, and of Steven's habit of letting them slip through his fingers one at a time. She knew that he was trying to show that he was better informed than she, and should therefore be in charge.

'The Monk's TARDIS,' he explained. 'It usually disguises itself. Appears as something to suit its surroundings. Like the Doctor's should...'

'Maybe the Monk didn't bother this time?'

'Maybe – but I thought it was automatic.' Steven had a very easy feeling about this, which he tried to shrug off.

'Anyway, let's go and have a look at it...' He broke off, and pointed. There was now a door in the side of the cube facing them. 'He's coming out.'

The figure that paused in the doorway of the time-machine, however, was not the Monk. It was Mavic Chen, who stood there for a moment and then, shielding his eyes, moved into the sands. A Dalek glided out of the time-machine behind him.

'Daleks!' Steven exclaimed, but quietly.

'Here's our chance,' Sara said, drawing her blaster.

'Chance?' Steven echoed, gripping her arm to restrain her. 'Chance for *what*?

She looked right through him. For a second, she seemed to be looking at a ghost behind him, then she blinked, and gazed straight at Steven. 'We've got to face them.'

'Are you *mad*?' he hissed.

'Steven, if they break out, they will recapture the Taranium core.'

'They will anyway, if we go rushing blindly down there.'

Steven shook his head, firmly. 'We have to warn the Doctor.'

'Why?' Sara asked, bitterly. 'He doesn't care. All he'll do is take off again.'

'I don't think he will. But even if he does, we've got to wam him!' He looked at her, pleading, and saw that he had made absolutely no impression. 'All right, if we do try to take them out on our own and fail, they'll certainly get the core back. The Doctor won't even be on his guard!'

Sara was thinking of Bret again, and how she could redeem herself by killing Mavic Chen... she could almost taste the death of that arch-traitor... but then she realized that this was a selfish desire, and that logic was on Steven's side. Reluctantly, she reholstered her weapon. 'You win,'

she sighed. 'But we could have taken them with surprise on our side.'

'We can still plan something,' Steven argued, and they started back for the TARDIS. 'Haven't you ever heard of an ambush?'

This was an ill-chosen question. At that very second, the two of them were jumped by Egyptian soldiers. Hyksos had arrived with his guards, and had lain in wait for the two intruders. Totally unprepared

for this, the travellers were knocked down. The short staves the soldiers carried knocked both of them senseless. One soldier drew a bronze dagger, and held it to Steven's throat. A slight pressure, and Steven's lifeblood would stain the desert sands and atone for the trespass that they had committed.

7

Golden Death

Tuthmos had accompanied the armed party, and he was still looking for the old man that he had seen. He glanced around the stone blocks, then moved back swiftly to rejoin Hyksos. 'There are more of them.'

Reaching down, Hyksos stayed the soldier's hand, and the knife fell from Steven's throat. 'Guard these two,' the captain ordered this soldier and his comrade. 'The rest of you —follow me!'

Hyksos glanced out from the stones and saw Mavic Chen with the Dalek. The second figure made no sense to him, but the was seemed to be looking for something.

Quite clearly, he was a looter. With a gesture, Hyksos led his men out of hiding, and towards the intruder and the strange thing with him.

Seeing a dozen or more Egyptian warriors racing towards him, Made Chen dodged for the cover of a limestone block. The Dalek spun to face the newcomers.

One man threw a spear, which broke as it crashed into the Dulck's casing.

'We are under attack,' the Dalek reported back to the time-machine. It opened fire on the oncoming men. One of them paused, screamed, and burnt in the deadly radiation stream the Dalek had fired off. The soldier collapsed, dead.

The others stopped in their tracks, completely terrified by this.

Two further Daleks emerged from their time-machine, and moved to join the first. As they did so, the soldiers regained their nerve, and began to move forward again, though at a definitely slower pace.

'It is a small local force,' the first Dalek informed the others. 'Their weapons are primitive.'

‘Combined fire!’ one of the new arrivals ordered. Three guns spat death at once.

Two more soldiers were caught in the lethal rays as they hurled their spears. Both spears glanced off the Daleks, as both warriors fell, dead, to the sand.

Hyksos could see that his small force could not succeed in defeating these strange creatures. ‘Retreat!’ he called.

‘We need more men! Get the prisoners we have back to the camp! Retreat!’

The men needed no further urging. With one mind, they wheeled and sprinted back the way that they had come. They were as brave as any warriors, but these unknown intruders were too much for them to face.

The three Daleks ceased their fire and conferred. ‘Did we sustain damage?’ one asked.

‘No,’ the original Dalek replied. ‘Only the inhabitants of this time and planet, and they are unimportant.’

‘Understood. They are to be exterminated on sight.’

Hyksos and his men dodged in and out of the discarded stone blocks about the base of the pyramid, seeking only to lose the strange, metal beings that had killed their companions. Steven and Sara, unconscious, were carried along with them.

The Doctor returned the toolbox to the TARDIS, and picked up his stick once again. He walked back to the door, and carefully examined the lock with a measure of what he felt was justifiable pride. It was a long time since he’d had to field-strip his TARDIS lock, and he’d done a remarkably fine job. Especially considering all the interruptions he’d had.

He glanced about for the sources of those interruptions, but neither Sara nor Steven was anywhere to be seen. ‘Now where can they have got to?’ he asked himself crossly. It didn’t take him long to realize that they had disregarded his instructions and gone to try to stop the Monk by themselves. Admittedly the Monk was not exactly the type to go in for physical violence, but there was an awful lot that the slippery little character could do to trap them. He doubted that the Monk would actually harm them – he was more like a capricious child than truly

evil – but the Monk did have a problem of knowing exactly where he should draw the line. He might injure the foolish youngsters by accident.

Why did he always have to get these young people out of trouble? Sighing, he set off across the sands to find the Monk's TARDIS and free his companions. Some days, they were definitely more trouble than they were worth!

The day was getting oppressively hot, and the Doctor wasn't as young as he had been – and would be again, some day. He paused to loosen his tie, and to mop his forehead with his large handkerchief. Dodging around all this assorted bric-à-brac intended for the final resting place of the Pharaoh was quite exhausting. After a few further minutes, he was ready for a rest. Spying a gold-inlaid throne, he smiled to himself, and plopped down on it for a short breather. He started to mop his face again With a similar racket to that made by his own ship, the Monk's TARDIS materialized barely thirty feet away. It was disguised as one of the large building blocks. The Doctor could barely suppress his amusement, burying his face in his hankie to avoid being heard. Clambering to his feet, he dodged behind another of the blocks, and peered around its edge at the newly arrived TARDIS.

After a further moment, the door opened, and the Monk's eyes peered out. The little man blinked in the strong sunlight, and then vanished back inside. When he finally emerged, he was dressed in his usual Monk's habit, but sporting a pair of mirrored sunglasses that were very definitely out of place here – but also very handy. As the hidden Doctor watched, the Monk consulted something he held in his hand, and then set off in the direction of the Doctor's TARDIS, whistling off-key to himself.

The Doctor emerged from his hiding place and was about to follow the Monk when he suddenly realized something. Steven and Sara had gone off to investigate the Monk's TARDIS that they had seen land. Yet, he himself had just witnessed the arrival of the Monk. So... what had Steven and Sara seen?

Them was only one possibility that came to him, and it chilled his blood. 'Daleks...'

The Egyptian soldiers dropped the unconscious forms of the Doctor's companions to the straw-covered earth floor without much care. The interior of the house was considerably cooler than the desert, and at the moment far safer. The men made no move to leave. Tuthmos and

Khephren looked enquiringly at Hyksos.

The captain grunted. ‘Plunderers,’ he explained.

‘Robbers of the tomb.’

‘But what do we do about the others?’ Khephren asked, nervously, meaning the Daleks.

‘I will journey to the next encampment,’ Hyksos decided. ‘We shall need an army to do battle with their fire-throwing machines and the other intruders.’

‘Meanwhile,’ Khephren added, ‘I shall take my slaves into the tomb. The treasures that the Pharaoh has sent for his journey to the after-life will be safer inside its stone walls.’ He looked down at Steven and Sara. ‘There they will be easier to guard, also.’

Steven had recovered consciousness by now. His journeys with the Doctor had trained him to feign unconsciousness until he managed to get a grip of the situation. Through half-lidded eyes, he saw Hyksos and Khephren leave the room. Then, carefully, he tested his bonds. They were too tight for him to slip out of. The only ones left now were Tuthmos and a few guards, but they and the ropes were enough to keep Steven here. Since there was no point in further pretending he was unconscious, Steven sat up.

‘How long are you going to keep us here?’ he asked.

Tuthmos turned slowly to face him. ‘Until your friends are brought to join you,’ he replied finally. ‘Then you will answer for you crimes.’

‘We’ve nothing to answer for,’ Steven said. ‘We’re not *interested* in your treasures.’

‘Of course not!’ Tuthmos mocked. ‘You have travelled here for your health. Not even the old man is interested in any of the Pharaoh’s fine treasures?’

‘Not even the old man,’ Steven agreed, warily, wondering what the Doctor had been up to while he was unconscious. ‘Then,’ continued Tuthmos, ‘why did he examine so carefully the large blue box that stands with the Pharaoh’s other possessions?’

‘Probably because that old blue box is his, and not your Pharaoh’s.’

‘Now I know you lie!’ exclaimed Tuthmos, triumphantly. ‘Everything that the slaves hauled have across the desert belongs to the Pharaoh! It is all accounted for in our records. If the Pharaoh’s slaves brought the box here, then it is Pharaoh’s – and how else could the box have been brought here? Did the gods perhaps pluck it up and set it down, so?’ He imitated the gesture as he spoke, and then laughed, derisively.

Steven suddenly felt a slight movement behind his back, as fingers moved across the ropes that bound him. He realized that Sara must have awakened also, and was attempting to free him. It was important to make certain that this Egyptian overseer didn’t spot her at work, so Steven, to distract him, asked: ‘Why do you think that the treasures will be any safer in the tomb?’

‘Because the tomb will house the memories of the Pharaoh’s stay on Earth. His spirit will be free to visit it whenever it wishes.’ Tuthmos saw the blank expression on Steven’s face, and explained further: ‘His spirit will need no doors to enter – so the tomb, with the treasures inside, will be sealed.’

Steven finally got the point. ‘And we... we’ll be inside also.’

Tuthmos smiled. ‘It seems only fitting – after all, you came here for the treasures, didn’t you? This way, you can be with them – always!’

The Monk marched happily through the sand, half-wishing he’d brought along his bucket and spade; well, there’d be time for that later, after his revenge... He had no idea at all that the person he intended to get his revenge on was in fact following cautiously behind him, a big grin plastered on to his wrinkled features. The Monk’s whistle cut off short as he heard a slight noise from behind the next block.

Its surely couldn’t be the Doctor – he couldn’t possibly know that the Monk was here! Therefore it had to be a native. The Monk’s ideas of history were always a bit hazy

– he’d never paid attention in class – so he wasn’t *absolutely* convinecd that he’d be inconspicuous in his current attire.

He vaguely recalled something about monks in the Egyptian desert sitting on flagpoles or something, but couldn’t recall if that was BC, or AD – and, come to think of it, he wasn’t certain what the year was when he’d landed anyway. Ah well, nothing for it but to bluff it out and hope for the best. If you looked innocent, nine times out of ten you’d be left alone!

He placed his hands piously together, and kept his head low as he left his cover. ‘Good morning, my son,’ he said, in the holiest voice he could muster.

Then he stopped dead, as he understocid what it was he had just passed. His eyes widened behind the glasses. ‘A *Dalek*!’ he squeaked. He had paid attention to a few things in class...

The Dalek raised its gun, and trained it on the Monk’s quivering form. ‘Exterminate!’

8

Into the Pyramid

‘Wait!’ Mavic Chen stepped out from behind the Dalek, and pushed the gun-stick aside.

The Dalek’s eye-stick swivelled to focus on Chen.

‘Dalek orders will not be questioned!’ It raised its gun again, ready to kill the Monk.

Carefully, Chen interposed himself between the Dalek and the Monk. ‘Wait!’ he hissed. ‘This could help us to recover the Taranium core.’ His mind, devious as ever, had already thought out a plan. The Daleks might well be impervious to the primitive weapons that the Egyptian troops wielded, but he wasn’t. He had no desire to expose himself to unnecessary danger – especially when there was an unwitting idiot at hand to use...

The Dalek finally lowered its gun. ‘Proceed,’ it agreed.

The Monk let out the breath he had been holding, and opened his eyes again, happy to be still alive. He was quite certain that there would be a price to pay for this rescue, however.

Chen turned to face him, attempting a kindly smile. It resembled more the expression on the face of a snake about to strike. ‘So,’ he purred, ‘you have heard of the Daleks.’

Hopping nervously from foot to foot and uncertain whether he should address the Dalek or this human who seemed to have some authority, the Monk nodded.

Wringing his hands helplessly, he tried to put on a natural-looking smile, and missed by a long shot. ‘Er, yes... by reputation only...’

Chen raised an eyebrow. ‘Then you are certainly not of this time.’

‘No,’ the Monk agreed, forcing a better smile on to his lips. ‘Just a passing time-traveller. Anxious to move on,’ he added, hopefully, and took a step backward. The Dalek moved to cover his possible retreat, leaving the Monk in the unhappy position of having to talk to Chen with his back to the Dalek. Sweat started trickling down the inside of his habit. He wanted to scratch his back very badly, but didn’t dare make any movement with the Dalek covering him.

The Doctor was observing all this from his hiding place behind one of the granite blocks. He could hear perfectly, and was torn between apprehension for his companions and amusement for the predicament that the Monk had got himself into.

Chen was enjoying baiting this wretched little fellow, and played it to the hilt. ‘Three time-machines in one infinitesimal speck of space and time!’ He looked enquiringly at the Monk. ‘Of course, a coincidence is possible – but hardly likely. You would agree?’

Trying to keep one eye on the Dalek behind him, the Monk nodded vigorously. ‘Oh, yes,’ he said, enthusiastically. ‘I agree.’

‘Then why have *you* arrived here?’

Nervously, the Monk started twiddling his fingers.

‘Three time-machines,’ he stalled. ‘Yes, well, that’s mine, and yours and... the odd one out belongs to a... a certain Doctor...’

‘The enemy ship!’ the Dalek grated suddenly, almost terrifying the Monk to death.

‘Yes, yes, the *enemy* ship!’ the Monk nodded enthusiastically at this, having realized that the Daleks were also after the Doctor. No doubt, his old adversary had run foul of these nasty little creatures somehow. ‘I have an old score to settle with him.’ He waved his hand, airily.

‘But I’m sure yours is the prior claim.’

‘He is a friend of yours?’ Chen asked, politely.

‘Friend?’ The Monk fixed an expression of horror on his face. ‘Good heavens, no! An *enemy*! An enemy to end all enemies!’ Raising his voice to be certain that the Dalek could hear him, he added: ‘I came here to inflict a *terrible* vengeance on him! Oh, yes, we’re all of us here on the same side – against *him*!’

‘But he knows you?’ asked Chen.

That left the Monk in a bit of aquandary, since he was aware that a wrong answer was likely to get him exterminated. ‘Ah... well, ah... yes. But, then again, no!’

Chen could see that the little idiot was having problems deciding on what answer was required, so he helped out a little. ‘Could you gain his confidence?’

‘Oh *yes*, of course!’ The Monk beamed now, on safer ground. ‘Of course – if you *want* me to. No question of it!

Without a doubt!’

‘Then,’ Chen said, smoothly, ‘you may have a slight chance of saving your miserable life.’ Leaving the Monk to ponder on this, Chen moved to join the Dalek. Softly, he said: ‘I would suggest that we use this idiot traveller for our own purposes.’

The Dalek glanced at the quivering wreck. ‘There is no proof that he is to be trusted.’

‘Only his fear of the Daleks!’ Chen replied, knowing that a little flattery wouldn’t hurt. ‘He could well be able to recover the vital Taranium core with an ease that we, the Doctor’s enemies, could never hope to achieve.’

‘He claims to also be the Doctor’s enemy.’

Chen spread his hands. ‘He is obviously lying to save his own worthless neck.’

The Dalek considered this for a moment. ‘Failure could not be tolerated,’ it finally stated.

‘My interests in the conquest of the Universe are identical to yours,’

Chen reasoned. ‘If he fails, then another method will be necessary. But I am certain that this will succeed!’

‘I will consult Control,’ the Dalek decided. There was a short silence as it communicated with the Red Dalek in the time-ship. The Monk was biting his lips in apprehension, almost drawing blood. Finally, the Dalek glanced back at Mavic Chen. ‘Control allows him one Earth hour.’

Chen nodded his understanding, and then walked back to the Monk. Putting his arm around the smaller man’s shoulders, he said, confidentially: ‘The Doctor and his friends have in their possession a small device, a Taranium core, that belongs to the Daleks. You will recover this and bring it to me within one hour.’

‘Oh, I *shall*, I shall!’ the Monk said, nodding, and crossing his heart with his fingers. ‘I *promise*.’ In fact, he simply intended to dash back to his TARDIS and get out of here. Let the Doctor deal with this problem! He’d worry about getting his revenge later!

‘I need hardly remind you that the Daleks would reward failure on your part with extermination,’ Chen added, as if by an afterthought.

The Monk shook his head, firmly. ‘You’ll get it back, no fear. Little device, Taranium core. Right.’

‘Then you had better leave at once,’ Chen suggested.

‘And waste no more of your valuable time...’

The Monk nodded, and started to retreat. Chen raised an eyebrow, and gestured in the other direction, towards where the Doctor’s TARDIS stood. The Monk gave a watery smile, struck himself rather theatrically on the head, and then moved off in the right direction. He obviously had very little choice in the matter.

Mavic Chen smiled to himself when the Monk had vanished from sight. ‘Pity – I forgot to tell him that success would also bring a reward.’ Then he shrugged. ‘However, since it is the identical reward as for that of failure, I’m certain that he’ll overlook my omission...’

Khephren had his slaves working as fast as they could, carrying into the tomb all the treasures that the Pharaoh had sent along for his journey to the after-life. The large blue box that the old man had been examining had turned out to be surprisingly heavy, but they had finally managed to carry it inside. They had set it down in the main

chamber, close to the stone sarcophagus that would soon house the body of the Pharaoh. Khephren hurried the slaves out, returning them to the desert to collect further treasures for the tomb.

*

The Doctor's initial idea was to follow after the Monk and confront the rascal, but then he had a better thought.

Treading carefully, he set off back to where the Monk's TARDIS had landed. The rogue was always very sloppy, and – as the Doctor had expected – had not bothered to lock his TARDIS doors when he had left. Chuckling to himself, the Doctor hurried inside.

The Monk's time-space machine resembled the Doctor's own very strongly. It was, however, a slightly later model than the Doctor's, and boasted a few new features that the Doctor's old ship didn't have. Still, the controls were basically the same, and all of them actually worked. The Doctor moved to the panel of the central console that worked the chameleon circuits. Attempting to recall the manual override codes of the computer, the Doctor began to play with the switches.

Outside, the shape of the ship began to flow and change.

The stone block vanished, to be replaced by a tall Ionic column. That was then replaced by a Wells Fargo stage-coach – complete with curtains, but without the horses to draw it. Then it became a silver-leafed tree; an igloo; a small one-man rocket-ship; a Sopwith Camel; a small copy of the space museum that the Doctor had visited on Xeros

– the Doctor had at last got the hang of the controls.

Finally, it became the shape that the Doctor had been seeking.

A police telephone box, absolutely identical in form to the Doctor's own TARDIS.

With a smug grin of self-congratulation, the Doctor moved around the panels, until he came to the directional controls. Bending down, somewhat stiffly, he opened the underside of the console. After a little fiddling, he removed part of the circuit, and stuck it into his pocket. Then he closed the flaps. Cheerfully, he left the Monk's TARDIS, pulling the doors closed behind him.

Sara had finished untying Steven's hands, and he quickly returned the favour. The three guards left on duty with them had seen nothing,

since they spent most of their time in the doorway, scanning for any further signs of trouble.

The two time-travellers untied their feet, and. moved quietly up to behind the men.

They jumped on to the unsuspecting Egyptians as one.

Steven struggled with the one he had picked out, trying to wrestle him down. Sara simply chopped at the neck of the second guard. As he was falling, already unconscious, she spun around and kicked the third man hard in the stomach. As he doubled over, she grabbed his head and rammed it into the door-frame. He collapsed, and Sara turned to help Steven, who was still fighting with his single opponent. Shaking her head, she stepped up to the guard and rabbit-punched him. As he howled in pain, she chopped at the side of his neck, and the man fell unconscious on to Steven.

The astronaut pushed the man off him, and stood up, brushing down his clothes. 'Very impressive,' he remarked, honestly, staring at the three unconscious men.

'Standard training,' Sara said, brusquely, but she was not unpleased with the admiring glance she had caught.

'Let's find the Doctor.'

They slipped out of the door, scanning for signs of the Egyptians, but the sands were clear, save for the inevitable building blocks. Keeping to the cover provided by these, Steven and Sara made their way back to where they had left the TARDIS.

The Monk's TARDIS locator was proving to be most helpful, if more than slightly baffling. He had been following it to where the Doctor had landed, but now the reading had shifted. It didn't make a lot of sense, but that didn't bother the Monk. Unaccustomed to thinking things through, he simply accepted the fact that the reading was changed, and headed off in the new direction – straight towards the opening in the pyramid.

It was actually part of the way up the north face. A ramp of earth led up to it, battered down to form a serviceable causeway. It was by using such ramps that the stones had been dragged into place originally, and most of the ramps were now removed. This final one would remain until Khufu was buried and the last block placed to close off the entrance. Then it too would be taken apart and the soil

dispersed, leaving the tomb to stand alone.

The Doctor had caught up with the Monk again, but he was very puzzled about the direction that he was taking.

What was the silly fellow doing now? He followed the Monk up the ramp, puffing a bit, and then into the downward-sloping passageway. After a short while, a second passage branched off upwards, and this was the one that the Monk had taken. The Doctor again followed.

The Monk had arrived in the king's burial chamber.

The walls were painted brightly with scenes of both everyday life in the Nile delta and with representations of the after-life. It was intended to prepare the Pharaoh to face that after-life. The Monk ignored them, as he ignored the treasures that were already there. His face lit up as he saw the TARDIS standing in a corner of the room.

Rushing over, he tried the door, only to discover it was locked. He almost jumped out of his skin at the voice from behind him.

'You're wasting your time,' the Doctor said. 'There's no way in.'

Holding his heaving chest, the Monk spun about and tried to smile. 'Doctor,' he said, extending his hand. It was ignored, so he withdrew it and scratched his nose. He was getting sunburnt in this wretched place to cap his other miseries! Then he frowned. 'You've been following me!'

Moving to perch on the edge of the sarcophagus, the Doctor leaned on his stick and nodded. 'For a time, for a time...'

'I see.' The Monk inclined his head towards the TARDIS. 'I suppose I should have learned by now that you never leave this... *vintage* ship of yours unlocked.'

'Yes, yes, you should have learned that.' The Doctor chuckled, adding in a soft voice: 'Though I'm delighted you don't follow my example.'

The Monk missed this, too busy gloating about his own machine's superiority. 'Of course, if your ship blended into its surroundings like it was supposed to do, it wouldn't be necessary to lock it. Nobody would be able to find it.'

'Like yours, I suppose?' the Doctor hinted.

‘Yes, Doctor, like mine.’ He smiled, ingratiatingly. ‘You could learn a thing or two from *me*, you know.’

‘Could I?’ asked the Doctor, innocently.

‘Yes.’ The Monk moved closer to the Doctor, attempting to radiate camaraderie. ‘It’s a pity we’ve got this... well, feud, I suppose you’d call it... going. I mean, you didn’t track me on your Time-Path Indicator this time, did you?’

‘Not your machine, no,’ the Doctor admitted. ‘Although I didn’t realize it at the time.’

The Monk grinned, and patted himself on the chest. ‘I cross-jumped the track,’ he said, trying to sound modest and failing miserably at it.

‘Really?’ the Doctor asked, overdoing his admiration.

The Monk lapped it up.

‘Oh, yes, it’s really quite simple.’ He nodded towards the TARDIS. ‘Tell you what, why don’t we just nip inside? I’ll show you how it’s done – just to prove there are no hard feelings, eh?’

The Doctor stood up, and smiled. ‘And perhaps you could find the Taranium core as well, eh?’

‘Yes, that’s...’ The Monk’s voice trailed away as he suddenly realized that the Doctor must have overheard the whole conversation he’d had with the Dalek and that man.

He snapped his fingers, as if he’d just remembered something. ‘I *knew* there was something I had to tell you! I came to warn you about the Daleks.’

‘Warn me?’

Nodding, the Monk chortled to himself. ‘I played them along for a while. Tricked them beautifully, I thought. You know, they don’t like you? They don’t like you at all.’

‘Then why didn’t you?’ the Doctor asked.

‘What?’

‘Why didn’t you warn me?’

‘Oh, that.’ He thought feverishly for a moment for an excuse. ‘I didn’t want to interrupt!’ he finally replied. ‘You were talking. It would have been rude of me to interrupt.’

The Doctor raised his eyes to the roof at this thin ploy.

‘Of course it would have been. I can see I’d better put you out of harm’s way before I go looking for my two young friends.’ He moved towards the Monk, raising his walking stick menacingly.

The Monk backed away, nervously. He had never been a physical person. ‘Come now, Doctor,’ he wheedled. ‘You *surely* didn’t think I was going to help the Daleks, did you?’

‘I don’t think you were going to help anybody,’ the Doctor replied. ‘You’re trying to play both ends against the middle... and simply help yourself.’

The Monk backed further off. ‘Couldn’t we talk this over?’ he pleaded. ‘Like civilized time-travellers? The Daleks don’t want you, they just want their silly little core back. Why don’t we just give it to them, so we can all be on our happy ways again?’

‘If you believe *that*,’ the Doctor snorted. ‘You’ll believe anything! I know the Daleks better than anyone. Once you’ve stopped being useful to them, they will kill you.’

The Monk was now wedged in the corner, with nowhere left to retreat to. ‘Don’t do anything you’ll regret,’ he cautioned the Doctor. ‘What are you going to do? Doctor?’

Within the Dalek time-machine, the Red Dalek moved to the main communications panel. ‘Give your report,’ it ordered the technician on duty there.

‘The time-traveller has not made contact.’

‘He has betrayed or failed us,’ the Red Dalek decided.

‘Prepare a task-force. All the humans in this area are to be exterminated.’

‘I obey.’ The technician turned back to the control panel, and began calling in Daleks from all parts of the time-machine.

The Red Dalek turned away. Another plan of their human ally, Mavic

Chen, had failed. Soon it would be time for his judgement also.

Steven and Sara had made it back to where they had left the TARDIS, to find it missing. It took them barely a few minutes to realize what had happened to it. The signs of the slave workers were obvious in the scuffed sand, and the furrows of where the TARDIS had been dragged towards the earthen ramp.

'Into the tomb,' Steven said. 'Let's hope the Doctor's still with the TARDIS.'

'If they've sealed the tomb, we'd better hope he isn't with the TARDIS,' Sara observed. In that case, the Doctor would have no option but to take off and leave them here...

with the Daleks.

The two of them were relieved to discover that the tomb was still unsealed, and they hurried into it. A little exploration soon led them to the funerary room, and they both heaved sighs of relief as they spotted the TARDIS in the corner.

'No Doctor,' Steven said grimly.

'Unless he's inside?' Sara suggested. Steven nodded and crossed to the police box. He rapped loudly on the doors.

'Doctor?' he called. 'Are you in there?' There was no answer.

Sara looked about the room with a certain amount of interest. It was loaded now with treasures – gold, silver and bronze metals, gleaming gems, polished and painted woods. Still, it was the huge stone sarcophagus in the centre of the chamber that caught her eye. Everything in the room indicated that the burial was imminent, but that it had not been completed – else the tomb would have been sealed. Yet the coffin in the sarcophagus had been closed.

As she puzzled about this, the back of her neck suddenly chilled. She tapped Steven, and he turned, following her horrified gaze.

The lid of the coffin was being slowly lifted from within by a bandaged hand...

9

Hostages

With a crash, the coffin lid hit the floor. The enshrouded figure in the coffin struggled into a sitting position, both bandaged hands stretched out before it, groping for something. Sara, normally the bravest of people, was utterly terrified by this apparition. Steven wasn't in much better shape. Though both of them knew that corpses don't rise from the grave, it was hard to actually believe that –

after all, they were in the depths of a pyramid, surrounded by funerary apparatus, the only light being provided by smelly rush torches blazing fitfully in the still air.

The mummy groaned, and other noises continued to come from it. The voice sounded vaguely familiar, and Steven and Sara found their fear draining, to be replaced by puzzlement. With one accord, they moved over to the cloth-wrapped figure, and began to tug at the wrappings about its face. In a moment, they had uncovered very familiar features.

'Well,' said the Monk, taking a deep breath. 'Thank goodness for that!'

'The plan has failed!' the Red Dalek grated, facing Mavic Chen within the Dalek time-machine.

'We cannot know that for certain,' the traitor argued. 'I agree, the time-traveller has not yet contacted us, but we have no idea of what difficulties he may have faced in trying to convince the Doctor of his good intentions.'

'He was given one Earth hour,' the Red Dalek answered.

'That has now expired!'

Chen brought his fist down in fury on the closest control panel. 'In the present situation we cannot afford to measure time exactly!'

'He has deceived us,' the Dalek insisted.

'I don't think he has,' Chen argued. 'He *dare* not! When will you Daleks ever learn that all things do not work to a pattern? You can't plan an invasion down to a second!

Flexibility can also lead to conquest.'

'Silence!' The Red Dalek had had enough of this unproductive discussion. The human believed that he was superior to the Daleks; he would discover his mistake in the second before he was annihilated.

‘All Daleks will disembark!’ it commanded to the technician Dalek. ‘All forms of life are to be treated as hostile and are to be exterminated.’

The assembled Daleks chorused their understanding, and began to file out of the door. The Red Dalek faced Chen once again. ‘You will come with us.’

Mavic Chen knew that the heavy-handed tactics of the Daleks were bound to cause problems – and that he would inevitably be blamed for them. ‘Recovery of the Taranium core was made my responsibility,’ he fumed.

The Red Dalek raised its gun-stick, and pointed it towards him. ‘Orders will not be questioned.’

Slapping the panel again in fury, Mavic Chen was forced to admit defeat. ‘If you insist on this approach,’ he warned,

‘I shall not be answering for the consequences!’ He brushed out of the time-machine ahead of the Red Dalek, and stomped off after the task-force.

Sara and Steven had finally got the Monk unwrapped from the funeral clothes, and had been forced to listen to his long-winded and self-justifying account of what had happened.

‘So it was the Doctor who tied you up?’ Steven broke in, finally, to shut the Monk up.

‘Unbelievable, isn’t it?’ the Monk said. ‘Oh, I know I succumbed to temptation on the planet Tigus and stranded you. But I would have come back again after a few minutes.

I just wanted to savour victory for a short while.’

‘I’ll bet,’ Steven said, sarcastically, refusing to be taken in by the Monk’s pure-as-the-driven-snow routine.

‘And what did the Doctor say?’ Sara asked, preventing an argument.

‘Nothing.’ The Monk spread his hands, helplessly. ‘Not a thing. There I was, taking untold risks just to warn him about the Daleks and – *bang* – right on the head with his stick, and into there.’ He pointed at the casket he’d recently clambered out of.

‘Well, when he hears your story, I’m sure he’ll apologize,’ said Sara, placatingly. Steven just snorted at the thought of the Doctor apologizing to anyone, least of all the Monk.

‘Oh, I’m not one to bear a grudge,’ the Monk murmured, in sweet, saintly tones. ‘I mean, we *all* know what the Doctor’s like, don’t we? No, it was just one of those things.’ He was beginning to sound like an entry from *Foxe’s Book Of Martyrs*.

‘Well, where did he go?’ Steven asked.

‘ *How do you expect me to…* ’ the Monk started to yell, then recollected his act and smiled again. ‘Unfortunately, after his brutal attack, the next thing I remember was…’ He waved to the coffin.

‘He’s probably out looking for us,’ Sara suggested to Steven. ‘After all, we have been gone a long time.’

‘All right,’ Steven agreed. ‘Now what do we do? Go out there again and take a chance on missing him? Or just wait here and hope he’ll come back soon?’

‘Stay here,’ said the Monk. ‘Definitely.’ Both of them ignored him.

‘He’ll need help if he meets the Daleks,’ Sara pointed out.

‘I’ve got *such* a headache,’ the Monk complained.

‘What happens if *we* meet them?’ Steven argued.

Oblivious to the fact that no one was listening to him, the Monk added: ‘Still, I suppose the Doctor’s got some medicine or other in the TARDIS…’

‘We’ll just have to take a chance on that,’ Sara replied to Steven.

‘So, if one of you will just lend me a key to the TARDIS,’ the Monk finished, hopefully. ‘I’ll just drop in and look for something.’

‘All right,’ Steven said, reluctantly, to Sara. ‘But I won’t even pretend that I like the idea.’

Sara looked down at the Monk. ‘What about this one?’

‘It’s one of those aches you get right over the eyes,’ he said, striving for the right measure of pain in his voice.

‘He can come with us,’ Steven decided. ‘That way, we can keep an eye on him.’

Sara nodded. ‘Come on then.’ She started down the passageway again. Steven gestured to the Monk to follow.

Clutching his temples in mock agony, the Monk asked, piteously: ‘Look, are you going to let me into the TARDIS

or not?’

‘I couldn’t,’ Steven said, cheerfully, ‘even if I wanted to.

The Doctor’s the only one with a key.’

That ruined all the Monk’s plans of nipping in and finding the core that the Daleks wanted. His face fell.

Misinterpreting the expression, Steven patted him on the arm. ‘Don’t worry, we’ll find him.’

‘That’s what I’m worried about,’ the Monk muttered, under his breath. The Doctor seemed to be on a lucky streak at the moment.

Mavic Chen disliked this time and place intensely. Though he had trained himself unstintingly over the years, and he was in perfect physical condition, the desert heat was enervating. The Daleks, inside their metallic casings, felt nothing of this, and had no need to rest. Chen was hesitant to show signs of weakness by demanding a break, so he pushed himself to continue.

After a few moments, they heard a man’s voice calling for the Doctor. Without a sound, the Daleks split up, and began to use the cover of the stones to make their way towards the calling human.

It was Steven, attempting to locate the missing Doctor.

Since he had seen no signs of the Daleks recently, he had mistakenly assumed that they were all elsewhere for the time being. He called again, with a similar lack of response.

Sara joined him.

‘It’s hopeless,’ she said. The desert seemed to eat up all noises, and they could hear nothing in response to Steven’s shouts.

‘I know it is,’ he admitted. ‘But what else can we do?’

Keep on calling, thought the Monk to himself, as he started to slip away. That way, the Daleks would all come looking for Steven, and he could make a quick getaway back to his own TARDIS and off this wretched planet.

Tiptoeing quietly away, he almost walked into a Dalek.

The gun-stick came up, trained on his face. 'Halt!'

Trying to hide his sinking feeling, the Monk grinned nervously. 'Ah, yes, I was just looking for you,' he began.

Other Daleks had appeared now, surrounding Steven and Sara as well as the Monk. The Red Dalek glided into sight, followed by the tired-looking form of Mavic Chen.

'Exterminate them!' the Red Dalek ordered.

'Exterminate?' squealed the Monk. 'When I've kept my part of the bargain?' His mind was racing now, figuring out a way to escape this situation alive.

At this piece of news, Chen regained some of his lost energy. Eyes burning, he hurried forward, hand outstretched. 'Give me the Taranium core!' he hissed.

'Well, I haven't actually got *that*,' the Monk replied. At those words, the Dalek guns all came up again, and he held up his hands swiftly. 'But I've brought you *hostages*!' He swept out his hands to indicate Steven and Sara.

'Hostages?' echoed Steven in disgust.

Mavic Chen looked at him and Sara with interest, as the Daleks moved to get a better field of fire. 'Hostages?' he mused. 'Yes – that could work. The Doctor's loyalty to his friends is beyond question.'

'No more discussion,' the Red Dalek grated. 'We will kill all three of them.'

'In exchange for their lives, the Doctor would hand us the Taranium core,' Chen pleaded, his mind working with all its customary cunning.

The Red Dalek spun its eye-stick towards Steven. 'Is that true?'

Steven didn't reply, and Mavic Chen laughed. 'Their silence confirms that it is.'

After a further moment, the Red Dalek turned to its closest subordinate. ‘Take them back to the time-machine.’

‘I obey.’ The Dalek moved to Steven and Sara, and prodded them. They looked at one another, but clearly had no option but to obey. They started walking off in the direction that the Dalek indicated.

The Monk hopped from foot to foot, smiling and wringing his hands. ‘Well, now that little problem’s solved,’ he said, ‘I’d better be...’

‘You will return with us!’ the Red Dalek commanded.

‘Yes, yes,’ the Monk hastily agreed. ‘That’s just what I was going to say: Now that little problem’s solved, I’d better be returning with you.’

With marked reluctance, he joined in the procession heading back towards the Dalek time-machine.

Khephren and his men were surprised to see a dazed and staggering Tuthmos emerge from the work shanty.

Khephren rushed to help his companion to stand, and saw a large bruise on the man’s neck.

‘The prisoners,’ Tuthmos said, thickly. ‘Escaped...’

‘Escaped?’ Khephren echoed, in shock. ‘We left the tomb unguarded...’

‘Then you must take your men and...’

‘No.’ Khephren shook his head firmly. ‘The war machines would kill us all. They are moving about again near the entrance. Hyksos said he would be back by midday with more troops.’ He gestured towards the sky.

‘We do not have long to wait.’ He set his friend down, and gestured for one of his slaves to fetch him a drink. Soon enough, they would be able to do something. Now, they could simply sit and wait.

Once inside the Dalek time-machine, Steven, Sara and the Monk were bundled into a side-chamber, guarded by a single Dalek. It was more than enough. The Red Dalek issued instructions to the communications operative, and after a few moments, that individual reported: ‘The audio circuits have been adjusted.’

‘What is its present range?’

‘Seven Earth miles.’

‘Mavic Chen can issue the ultimatum,’ the Red Dalek decided. ‘Fetch him here.’

The Monk seemed to have recovered a little of his good cheer. He stood on tiptoe to peer over the Dalek on guard.

‘There seems to be quite a bit of activity,’ he remarked, returning to where Steven and Sara stood. Both glared at him coldly, and he looked most upset. ‘What’s the matter?

Was it something I said?’

Steven felt like wringing the little man’s neck. ‘Don’t you think you’ve done enough?’ he growled.

Pretending to misunderstand him, the Monk nodded.

‘Yes, yes – I suppose saving your lives is enough for...’

‘What!’ Sara exclaimed, amazed at his cheek.

‘Well, we’re all here alive, aren’t we?’ the Monk rejoined. ‘Yes, it was quick thinking on my part. *Very* quick.’

Steven stared at him in astonishment. Finally, he managed to say: ‘I don’t believe it!’

‘You... you don’t actually think I *meant* what I said to them, do you?’ the Monk asked, as if surprised. Then his eyes widened. ‘You do!’ he exclaimed, as though the possibility had never occurred to him for a second. ‘My dear fellow, it was a desperate gamble, risking my own life to save yours...’

‘You weren’t *really* planning on offering us to them as hostages?’ Sara asked, half-believing him.

‘Of course not!’ the Monk replied, truthfully. He’d actually been attempting to give everyone the slip and get back to his TARDIS. The idea of their being used as hostages was simply what he had considered to appease the Daleks. Now he was in the same boat as Steven and Sara, it was important that he should gain their confidence. If they were able to get away, he’d manage to escape with them. If they didn’t... well, he could always tell the Daleks that he’d been acting as a double agent... they might even believe him.

Steven had a good idea of what was going through the Monk's mind. 'Don't even listen to him,' he warned Sara.

'You can trust him about as much as you can trust the Daleks.'

'My performance was that good, was it?' asked the Monk, pretending he was pleased. 'I knew I had to fool the Daleks, but I thought *you* would see right through it.'

Dubiously, Sara said: 'He could be telling the truth, Steven.'

'Only *could be*?' the Monk asked, wounded. 'How could you possibly think I'd side with those creatures against you? It quite shatters my faith in human nature.'

'Yes,' Steven said, unsympathetically. 'Well, it can stay shattered, because I for one don't trust you an inch.'

At that moment, the technician Dalek returned to the main control room with Mavic Chen. Both crossed to the communications section, where the Red Dalek spun to face the human.

'Speak the ultimatum into the audio circuit,' it ordered.

Nodding, Chen crossed to the microphone that the Red Dalek was indicating. 'Doctor?' he called, firmly. 'Doctor, wherever you are now, you should be able to hear me.' He looked down at the Red Dalek, which was examining the controls.

'Continue,' the Dalek said. 'The audio circuit is functioning.' The trio of prisoners had been watching with interest. Sara said, thoughtfully: 'Some sort of loudspeaker system.'

Steven nodded. 'Maybe it would be best if the Doctor couldn't hear it.'

Mavic Chen continued to speak. 'Doctor, it is useless to try to fight us any more.' Outside the time-machine, his voice boomed over the desert sands, reverberating from the stone faces of the pyramid. 'Your two young friends are being held prisoner by the Daleks. You know why we have pursued you through space and time. We want the Taranium core that you stole. You are to proceed to the Dalek time-machine, south of the Great Pyramid, and receive your instructions.'

By the north face of the pyramid, Tuthmos, Khephren and their slaves could hear the gigantic voice echoing loudly about them. The slaves had fallen to their knees, covering their ears, but the two supervisors

remained standing.

‘The vital core will be returned to us,’ the strange voice continued. ‘Failure will result in the death of your friends.’

Tuthmos looked terrified. ‘It is the voice of the gods,’ he whispered.

Khephren shook his head, firmly. ‘No, Tuthmos. If it were the gods speaking to us, they would speak a message that we understood.’

Tuthmos was not convinced by this line of reasoning.

‘Who else could speak in such a voice like thunder?’

Thoughtfully, Khephren put it together in his mind.

‘The same mortals who come to loot our treasures, and build war machines that throw fire. When Hyksos returns, you will see the end of these false gods.’

Having delivered his message, Mavic Chen strode towards the door of the ship, passing the hostages as he did so. He paused and looked in their direction for a moment. ‘For your sakes,’ he remarked, pleasantly, ‘I hope that the Doctor does not keep us waiting long.’ With a sneering smile, he left the machine, followed by several of the Daleks.

Sara gritted her teeth, She wanted so much to kill that man! He continued to betray the human race, allying himself with the Daleks. Controlling her fury, she said:

‘We should try to warn the Doctor.’

‘Warn him?’ the Monk asked. ‘Whatever for?’

Ignoring him, Sara looked across at the communications panel. ‘If one of us could get to that microphone...’

‘It wouldn’t stop him coming here,’ Steven observed. ‘In fact it would probably make him more determined.’

At that moment, they heard the Doctor’s voice from outside.

‘All right – I’m here. Tell me what you want me to do,’

The Doctor had arrived, and was leaning on his walking stick, without apparent fear. Mavic Chen and the Daleks spun about to face him. The

Dalek guns came up, but did not fire.

‘Where are they?’ the Doctor demanded.

‘Come, now, Doctor,’ Chen said, smiling. ‘Surely you don’t expect...’

‘Where are they?’ the Doctor repeated.

Mavic Chen smiled again, then turned to the Red Dalek.

‘It seems that the Doctor requires proof of what we say.’

‘Bring the prisoners out!’ the Red Dalek ordered.

‘We want the Taranium core,’ Chen told the Doctor while they waited. ‘And there is nothing you can do to stop us now!’

The Doctor didn’t reply directly, merely letting his angry glare rest for a moment on the arch-traitor. Chen shuffled slightly, uncomfortable for a reason he could not place. After a further moment’s silence, Steven and Sara appeared in the doorway, accompanied by the Monk. The latter waved cheerily. ‘Hello, Doctor!’

Their Dalek guard gave the Monk an ungentle prod with its arm. ‘Silence!’

The Doctor turned back to Mavic Chen. ‘Very well,’ he agreed, heavily. ‘I will return the core.’

Certain of his victory, Chen’s smile was predatory. ‘Very wise,’ he murmured.

‘But on my terms!’ the Doctor thundered.

‘You are in no position to make demands, Doctor,’ Chen growled. ‘A Dalek escort will accompany...’

‘No escort!’ The Doctor drew himself erect, staring furiously at Chen, one hand gripping his lapel with such force that his knuckles turned white. He shook his walking stick in Chen’s face. ‘And on my terms.’

The Red Dalek spoke up at last. ‘We could exterminate you now.’

The Doctor looked down at the Dalek in contempt, as if noticing it for the first time. ‘Indeed you could,’ he agreed.

‘But then you’d never get your Taranium, would you?

Would you?'

Anxious to regain the lead in the recovery of the core, Chen interrupted. 'What are your terms, Doctor?'

'The core will be handed over to you and one Dalek.

Your three hostages...'

'Three?' Chen asked, raising his eyebrows in surprise.

'Yes,' the Doctor sighed. 'I include that Monk fellow, too – although I can't think why I bother.' Actually, the Doctor didn't really dislike the Monk, and he was certain that with the proper guidance, the man might make himself useful instead of troublesome. Maybe... 'The three of them will be brought to a rendezvous spot and handed over at the same time.'

Chen smiled again. 'Why don't we do it here?'

Glaring in disgust at him, the Doctor snapped: 'You know the answer to that as well as I do: because none of you can be trusted. You and one Dalek – by the west angle of the Great Pyramid – in twenty minutes!'

Before Chen could say anything else, the Red Dalek grated: 'We accept!' Spinning its head, it ordered: 'Take the prisoners back inside!' The Dalek guard prodded the Monk, and the three of them trooped back, the Monk making one last little wiggle of his fingers in the Doctor's direction.

'I should go now, Doctor,' Mavic Chen advised. 'Before the Daleks change their minds.'

The Doctor favoured him with another of his withering glances, and seemed about to speak. Then, shaking his head with disgust, he turned and marched off. The Red Dalek glided to join Mavic Chen until the Doctor had disappeared into the jumble of blocks.

Chen looked down at the Red Dalek. 'I am surprised that you met his terms so readily,' he remarked.

The Dalek spun its eye-stick to face him. 'One Dalek is capable of exterminating them all!' Its head whipped about, and the Dalek returned to the time-machine.

Chen cocked his head to one side, and smiled to himself. Yes, that should tie up all the loose ends quite neatly...

10

Escape Switch

Khephren and Tuthmos were immensely relieved when Hyksos reappeared. The swarthy foreign warrior was smiling to himself, but appeared to be alone.

'Did you bring the men?' Khephren demanded, urgently.

'Already moving into position,' Hyksos grunted. 'They are simply awaiting my command. Have the war machines been sighted?'

'No. But we have heard them speak in a mighty roar!'

Khephren wrung his hands together with worry. 'Hyksos –

the Tomb of the Pharaoh remains unsealed.'

Hyksos considered carefully. Against these fire-spitting demons, much caution and planning was needed. Finally, he made up his mind. 'Take your slaves,' he instructed the overseer. 'I will give you some of my men for escort so that you may work in safety. By the time that you have finished your work, we shall have destroyed the other intruders.'

The Doctor held the Taranium core in his hand, and looked at it with a measure of despair. He had managed to keep it out of the Daleks' hands so far, thus frustrating their schemes. Now, however, he had run out of ideas. He had no option in the matter – saving his friends at the moment was of paramount importance. The core had to be taken back to Kembel to be used, then perhaps, once Steven and Sara were rescued, there was something that could still be done to halt the Daleks.

He broke out of his dark thoughts, and left the TARDIS, carefully locking it as always. Somehow, the tomb it stood in seemed to be an omen of how things would turn out.

The Red Dalek glided to Mavic Chen. 'It is time for the exchange,' it said. 'Bring the prisoners.'

Chen walked to where the Dalek guard was still watching Steven, Sara and the Monk. With a curt gesture, he indicated for them to follow

him. As they did so, Steven grabbed the Monk's arm.

'If you try any more of your funny business,' he threatened, 'I'll exterminate you myself.'

'Funny business?' the Monk asked, all injured innocence. 'Me?'

Despite the agreement with the Doctor, as soon as the small party had left the Dalek time-machine, six other Daleks followed at a short distance. The Red Dalek was leaving nothing to chance; the other six would spread out, ready to annihilate the time-machine travellers once the core had changed hands.

Hyksos had a man watching, who signalled back with a short blast on a reed once he saw movement from the strange block in the desert. Moving to his hidden troops, Hyksos encouraged them. 'Be on your guard! The war machines will kill without warning.' He checked that they were all ready, and in the correct positions for what he had in mind. The strange fire-spitting creatures might be mobile enough on the desert sands, but his men were in hiding atop the large granite blocks, above the creatures'

line of sight...

As they arrived at the rendezvous point, the Red Dalek turned to Mavic Chen. 'You will take the Taranium core.'

'Yes, of course.'

The Red Dalek spun to face the prisoners. 'There will be no movement from you until the handover is completed.'

'It's not being done on your terms,' the Monk muttered softly. 'Why don't you just shut up?' As the eye-stick rested on him, though, his small defiance was shed, and he smiled beatifically at the Dalek.

'I can see you all,' came the Doctor's voice. 'You will move when I tell you, and as I tell you.' He was crouched behind one of the stone blocks, clutching the Taranium core in his hand. 'Mavic Chen!'

'Yes, Doctor?'

'Walk towards me.' The Doctor saw that the traitor started towards him. The Red Dalek began to follow. 'The Dalek will stand still!' Reluctantly, the Dalek did so. Chen crossed the ground to join the Doctor, and held out his hand. 'I am now handing the core to Mavic

Chen!' the Doctor called out. He gave the core over, but retained his grip with one hand. The other held his stick, ready to strike down Chen if there was any sign of treachery.

Together, they moved into the open.

'You will now release your prisoners!' the Doctor ordered. 'When they move away, I will bring the core to you.'

'Don't trust them, Doctor!' Steven cried.

The Red Dalek spun to face him. 'Move away!' it commanded.

The three of them did so, heading for the safety of the stones. Still both holding the core, Mavic Chen and the Doctor began to walk slowly towards the waiting Dalek.

Everything was in position, and Hyksos yelled: 'Now!

Attack!'

Several of the Egyptian troops jumped from their hiding places, and began to dash towards the Dalek, the most dangerous foe. The Red Dalek raised its gun and fired. One soldier, briefly outlined in the radiation flare, screamed and died.

Taking advantage of the Doctor's shocked response to the unexpected attack, Mavic Chen tugged the core free of the Doctor's grip, pushed at the old man, and then dashed back towards the Dalek time-machine. The Doctor fell, and then hastily clambered to his feet, aiming to chase him. Before he could, Steven grabbed hold of him.

'Doctor! Back to the TARDIS!'

'Mavic Chen!' the Doctor gasped, struggling unsuccessfully to free himself from Steven's grip. He was dragged back towards the tomb and away from the fighting.

Hyksos watched as the Dalek backed off slightly, and waved his men into the attack. The war machine was almost in the right position now... the Dalek fired again, and another of the soldiers screamed and died.

'Now!' Hyksos shouted to his men atop the blocks, as the Dalek backed closer in. On his signal, the soldiers started to pelt the fire-demon with large rocks.

As the first rock smashed against it, the Red Dalek began to panic. The primitive spears and knives could not harm it, but the rocks were another matter. Signalling its hidden forces, it called: 'I am under attack! I am under attack!' It fired in all directions, but Hyksos's exposed troops had dived for cover. The men above the Dalek continued to drop their stock of rocks on to it while it could not fire up at them. One rock crashed down on the Dalek's gun-stick, breaking it. In a shower of sparks, it ceased to function. Panicking now, the Dalek repeated its cries for help.

The six Daleks that had begun their encircling of the area abruptly changed their courses, and instead began to converge on the site of the battle. 'It was a trap,' the patrol leader decided. 'Exterminate the time-travellers!'

Steven was having trouble dragging the Doctor back towards the TARDIS. 'We've got to go back!' the old man insisted, stubbornly.

'We can't, Doctor, we can't!' Steven exclaimed. It would be suicide to try to break through the Egyptian troops and then the Dalek forces. At that moment, Sara turned up, and also grabbed the Doctor.

'All right, all right!' He yielded extremely reluctantly to their insistence, and together they raced towards the entrance of the pyramid.

In all the action, none of them had realized that the Monk was no longer with them. While he was grateful that the Doctor had included him in the deal, the Monk had very little desire to hang around and thank him. Taking advantage of the noise and confusion, he slipped off and started to hare back to his own TARDIS.

The Red Dalek was in serious trouble now. The rocks had smashed its casing, damaging many of the circuits. It could no longer move, as the rocks continued to pile up about it. Another good blow shattered its eye-stick, and its cries for help were becoming weaker.

'It cannot move!' Hyksos called. 'Bring larger blocks!'

The troops that had hidden themselves emerged again, carrying slabs of stone. They used these to pound away at the Red Dalek's casing, and to pile up around it. The noises and motion from inside the shell slowly died away.

Once they had regained the passage inside the pyramid that lead to the sarcophagus room, the Doctor, Steven and Sara paused to catch

their breath.

‘You did it, Doctor,’ Steven grinned. ‘You did it again.’

‘I’m afraid not, young man,’ the Doctor answered, grimly.

Puzzled, Sara asked: ‘Then what went wrong?’

‘The Daleks got the real Taranium core this time.’

Seeing Sara’s horrified expression, the Doctor nodded glumly. ‘I wanted to go after it at first, but it would have been hopeless. Hopeless!’

‘But...’ Sara felt the universe unravelling about her.

‘Now the Daleks will win – there’s nothing to stop them!’

‘Except this,’ the Doctor replied, softly, taking the small circuit section from his pocket and showing it to his companions.

What is it?’ Steven asked.

‘One of several emergency measures that I took,’ the Doctor informed him. ‘It’s a directional unit from the Monk’s TARDIS.’

‘Directional...’ Sara mused, and then understood what the Doctor meant. It wasn’t over yet! ‘Then we can get back to Kembel!’

‘Perhaps,’ the Doctor cautioned. ‘Perhaps!’

At that moment, there was a sound from behind them, at the top of the passageway. All three glanced towards it.

‘Back to the TARDIS!’ the Doctor hissed, leading the way at a run.

At the mouth of the tunnel, Khephren smiled grimly to himself. The old man and his two friends, the first looters, were all inside. He gestured to the slaves. ‘Seal off the tomb’ If they wanted the treasures so badly, let them have them – for now. In a matter of days, their air would run out, and they would die, horribly, in the darkness. The pyramid could then be unblocked to receive the Pharaoh’s body. It would have three spirits waiting to show it the way to the underworld...

Obediently, the slaves started their work, bringing up loose rubble and stones, and then the larger rocks to finish the task of closing up the

entrance.

The Monk, robes up around his knees, ran as fast as he could imagine until he reached the spot where he had left his TARDIS. Then he halted in shock. Instead of a stone block, he saw a police telephone box, incongruously perched in the desert.

'It's that Doctor again!' he muttered to himself. 'What's he been up to this time?' He reached out and touched the ship cautiously. It wouldn't have been beyond the Doctor to have left him a few more little surprises yet...

At that moment, two of the Daleks from the patrol sighted him. Seeing the obvious shape of the Doctor's TARDIS, and a figure by it, they drew exactly the incorrect assumption that the Doctor had intended them to. 'It is one of the time-travellers!' a Dalek grated. 'Exterminate!'

The Monk threw his caution about what the Doctor might or might not have done to the winds. With a remarkable turn of speed, he shot through the door and slammed it behind him. As the Daleks fired, he was safe.

In the glare of their beams, the Daleks could make out the police box fading, and then vanishing away from sight.

The patrol leader arrived as the TARDIS vanished.

'They have escaped!' it grated. 'We shall continue the pursuit. The Taranium core must be recovered – and the time-travellers annihilated!'

At that moment, Mavic Chen arrived, his chest heaving with the strain of out-racing the Egyptian troops. The patrol leader spun to face him. 'Mavic Chen – you have failed again!'

Another of the Daleks raised its gun-stick.

'Exterminate!'

'Failed?' Chen echoed. 'But I have it!' He held out the core. 'I have it here. Look!'

The patrol leader moved forward, and examined the core carefully. Then it focused on Chen. 'You have succeeded. Return to the time-machine. We shall return to Kembel immediately!'

Khephren watched as the slaves placed the final block in position, and then smiled. ‘Now the King’s treasures are safe – for ever!’

Back in the TARDIS once more, Sara watched on the scanner as the last block slid into place. Darkness settled outside. Shuddering in horror, she whispered: ‘They’ve blocked us in. Doctor, we’re trapped!’

The Doctor was engaged in wiring the directional unit he had stolen from the Monk into his own circuits. He seemed not to be worried at all by the latest catastrophe.

Steven touched Sara on the arm. ‘Don’t interrupt him –

he’s busy.’

‘What’s the point if we’re sealed in?’ Sara asked bitterly.

‘Don’t worry about that,’ the Doctor finally offered.

‘The TARDIS can move through solid matter without any problem at all. We travel through the dimension of time, as well as that of space, remember?’ He examined his handiwork critically. ‘Dear, dear – this part is from a Mark Four TARDIS.’

‘Isn’t it going to work?’ Steven asked, anxiously.

‘There are two possibilities.’ The Doctor steepled his hands together, and rested his chin on them. ‘One – yes, it will work. Two – not so pleasant, I’m afraid – that the increased energy demand of this circuit will smash the TARDIS utterly to pieces.’

That was hardly encouraging, and Sara had another disquieting thought. ‘What about the Daleks? If we do get back to Kembel, won’t they be able to track us there?’

‘I think not.’ The Doctor smiled. ‘I suspect that they will be tracking something else instead.’ His smile grew larger as he saw the puzzled expression on the faces of his young friends. ‘While I was taking this unit, I took the liberty of changing the Monk’s TARDIS into a police box.’

‘Like yours?’ Sara realized, and then started to laugh.

‘So the Daleks will be tracking his ship, and not us!’

‘Quite so, quite so,’ the Doctor agreed, chuckling at the thought of his own brilliance.

‘Well, I hope that the Daleks don’t catch the Monk,’

Steven said.

Considering how hostile Steven had been towards the Monk, Sara found his sudden concern surprising. ‘Even after all the trouble he’s caused?’ she asked.

‘I shouldn’t worry about it,’ the Doctor said. ‘He’s probably well on his way by now.’

Steven looked thoughtful, then finally asked: ‘Will he be back for his revenge again?’

‘Perhaps some day,’ the Doctor mused. ‘Though I hope he’ll grow out of the desire for it. But he’s got another problem now. You see, by taking his directional unit, I’ve set him adrift in time and space – he’ll never be able to find us again!’

Within the Dalek time-machine, everything was well organized. Mavic Chen hovered about the main panel as the Daleks powered up the ship for the leap through time and space. In his hand he still held the vital Taranium core.

‘Course for Kembel has now been computed,’ the technician reported to the patrol leader. Since the destruction of the Red Dalek, the patrol leader had taken command.

‘Have all preparations for take-off been made?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then activate the units,’ the leader ordered. The technician obeyed. With its usual whispering sound, the Dalek time machine faded from the Egyptian sands.

Outside the pyramid, Khephren and Tuthmos rejoined Hyksos. The Red Dalek was long since buried under a small mountain of rocks.

‘Most of the unused building materials can be used,’

Tuthmos was explaining.

‘Yes,’ agreed Khephren, slowly. ‘The war machine will never again be free to wreak destruction on our people.’

‘But what if the Pharaoh feels that a mound of rocks will be

inappropriate for the site of the House of Eternity?'

Hyksos growled. 'He might order their removal.'

'I shall order my skilled masons to work on the stones,'

Khephren informed him. 'The rocks will be shaped into a monument to celebrate our victory over the robbers and murderers who stole among us. We shall shape the mountain into a guardian of the Great Pyramid.'

'Good idea,' Hyksos said, practically. 'You have a shape in mind?'

'Have you heard of the legend of the Sphinx?' Khephren asked.

Within the TARDIS, the mood was a lot gloomier. The Doctor straightened up, and surveyed the results with Steven and Sara.

'Finished?' Steven asked, dreading the possible answers.

'Yes,' the Doctor replied slowly. 'Unfortunately, there's no way of testing it.'

'Except by using it,' Sara finished.

'Quite.' The Doctor looked at them both with considerable concern and affection. 'You do both agree that it is essential that we try to return to Kembel?'

Sara and Steven exchanged glances. 'There's no question of that,' Sara answered, firmly. She had to defeat the Dalek invasion plans now, more than ever. It was the only way that she could lay the ghost within her mind.

'You do understand,' the Doctor persisted, 'that we are taking a terrible risk?'

'But we do have a chance,' Sara replied.

'Yes, my dear – a chance!'

'Then you can save your breath, Doctor,' Steven broke in, just as determined. 'We all know that we have to try.'

The Doctor nodded slowly at this, and moved forward.

Standing at the console, he waved both of his companions back as he

laid in the time and space co-ordinates for Kembel. Finally, taking a deep breath, he threw the switch that started the drive.

There was the usual horrible grinding sound of dematerialization – followed a second later by a terrific explosion that flung the Doctor away from the panel.

There was a huge flash, and then total, utter silence.

11

The Abandoned Planet

The Dalek time-machine rematerialized on the planet Kembel in the main control area of the Dalek city. The Daleks on duty turned to face it, and the city administrator moved to the entrance. Mavic Chen and the patrol leader emerged from the cube.

'The Dalek Supreme awaits your full report,' the administrator said.

'The mission was a success,' the patrol leader replied.

This was insufficient for Mavic Chen, who was expecting a hero's welcome rather than a terse, one-line comment. 'The Time Destructor can now be completed,'

he announced. 'With this Taranium, the Universe will be ours. With my guile and cunning, I have been able to recover it for our Alliance. I have earned an equal partnership with the Daleks.'

The administrator ignored him, and turned to the patrol leader. 'Are you certain it is the real core?'

'Of course,' Mavic Chen answered. 'I had it examined while we were in flight. It is ready to be taken to the Time Destructor.' He paused, and glowered darkly at them. 'I hope that the *Daleks* will not suffer any more setbacks which could upset the plan.'

Addressing the patrol leader, the administrator ordered:

'Take charge of the core.'

'No!' Mavic Chen disagreed. He smiled as he spoke, but there was an edge to his voice. 'I – Mavic Chen, Guardian of the Solar System – will present it personally to the Black Dalek.' He started off, and then paused to look back at the two Daleks. 'There was some doubt expressed as to my loyalty to the great invasion plan. I intend to

savour the moment of gratitude.'

'The final members of the Galactic Council await you,'

the administrator informed him.

'I shall go and address them,' Chen said, arrogantly.

' *Presently*.' He marched out of the room.

The patrol leader watched him leave, and then his eye-stick moved to cover the administrator. 'Conquest of such people will present us with little difficulty.'

'His arrogance and greed leave him with no further use for us,' the administrator grated. 'Alert the Council to attend their final meeting.'

'I obey.' The patrol leader also left the room. The administrator spun to face the technician, which was organizing the powering-down of the Dalek time-machine.

'Were the humans eliminated?'

'No,' the technician answered. 'They are no longer a threat to our plan. Our instruments tracked their time and space craft, but pursuit would have resulted in delay.'

'Understood.' The administrator considered for a moment. 'The task-force is to disembark. The Dalek Supreme has arranged for a final conference before the invasion begins. The task-force will be required then.'

The Dalek administrator spun and left the room.

Matters were under way. With the recovery of the Taranium core, the Time Destructor could be prepared for use. The Doctor had apparently abandoned his attempts to interfere with the Daleks' masterplan – a wise decision that might save him his life – for a short while longer.

Steven groaned as he regained consciousness. Rubbing the back of his head, he opened his eyes and looked around.

There was a pall of smoke still over the central console, and the charred ruins of the Monk's directional guidance unit.

Steven clambered to his feet, and checked Sara. She was coming round, so he helped her to sit up, and then went over to the Doctor.

Aiding the old man to his feet, Steven asked: ‘What happened?’

Wafting his handkerchief over the console to dispel the last of the smoke, the Doctor indicated the burned-out unit. ‘Exactly what I was afraid of,’ he replied, between coughs. ‘The newer unit required a higher energy rate –

higher than the output of the TARDIS.’

‘We must have been knocked out.’

The Doctor shook his head. ‘Overcome by noxious fumes, I suspect. Luckily for us, the TARDIS refines the air immediately, which must have revived us again.’

Shaking off Steven’s help, he moved to the console. ‘I’ll see how bad the damage is – you look after the young woman.’

‘Are you sure you’re all right?’ Steven asked, warily. The Doctor had been the closest to the explosion.

‘Yes, yes, perfectly. Don’t fuss, dear boy.’ He peered at the console. ‘Dear me, dear me, what a mess.’ He started to unhook the black, melted mess from the panel. As he worked, Sara came up behind him.

‘Is it true?’ she demanded.

‘Mmm?’ the Doctor mused. ‘Is what true, my dear?’

‘ *That we can’t go after the Daleks!* ’ Sara yelled.

‘Yes, yes, I’m afraid it is.’ He sighed, heavily. ‘I’m afraid my little scheme wasn’t such a good idea, was it?’

‘Then you’ll have to repair the TARDIS’s mechanism, Doctor.’ Sara told him firmly. ‘You’d better begin at once.’

‘It isn’t as easy as that, child!’ The Doctor stared at the controls despondently. If he was to be honest, he should tell her that he didn’t even know how to begin a major overhaul of the TARDIS’s systems. There were so many minor broken parts, so much work to do – and very few spares aboard with which to do them. He simply didn’t like to be cluttered up with too many mechanical things.

‘No – we must face the fact that we tried. And we failed.’

Steven had joined them by now. ‘So we’re back to just wandering

aimlessly through space and time like we've always done,' he said, heavily.

The Doctor ignored this remark, turning back to the panel. He had prised free the noxious mess of the directional unit. Glancing about, he saw nowhere to put it, so he gestured for Steven to hold out his hands. Steven did so, and discovered the sticky circuit dropped into them.

With a scowl, Steven went off to find somewhere to get rid of it. The Doctor returned his own attention to the panels, and began using his hankie to polish up the controls again.

He hated it when they looked dirty.

'So,' Steven said, having dumped the circuit in a small waste disposal unit in the dining room. 'Where *are* we now, Doctor?'

'Still in ancient Egypt, I suppose,' Sara answered. 'If what he said is true.' She hated the thought that the Daleks had escaped them, and wanted nothing more than to be after them again. She realized, however, that this was obviously impossible now. She felt like a total failure. In the back of her mind, she could see Bret's dying face again.

Was it all for nothing? she wondered.

'Just look at those dials!' the Doctor exclaimed. 'Not one of them is giving a correct reading.'

Steven glanced at them, though they made no sense to him at all. The Doctor had never bothered explaining what any of them were designed to measure. A thought struck him. 'Turn the scanner on, Doctor,' he said, eagerly.

'Mmmm?' The Doctor nodded. 'Yes – if it's still working.' He flicked the correct switch, and the screen lit up as they watched it.

It showed a jungle with trees reaching for the sky, and brightly coloured blooms scattered about. The three of them were astonished, and watched silently as the camera panned about them in a circle.

'One thing's for sure,' Steven commented. 'It isn't ancient Egypt. It looks more like Kembel.'

The Doctor nodded, happily. 'It *is* Kembel,' he exclaimed with relish. 'The unit must have burnt itself out after effecting dematerialization!'

He abruptly rounded on Sara. ‘Perhaps that will teach you not to say that my scheme was not a good one!’

‘I say... ?’ Sara objected. ‘But...’

‘ *Failed* indeed! Huh!’ The Doctor looked quite insulted as he snapped off the viewer and headed for the doors.

Steven, trying to hide his grin, said: ‘You’ll have to excuse her, Doctor – but she hasn’t known you for very long.’

The Doctor took up his walking stick from the rack, and fastened on his cloak. ‘Yes, well, she’ll know in future, won’t she, my boy? If I say we’re going to do a thing – *then we’ll do it*!’ He raised his stick, pointed outside, and marched out.

Sara was speechless at the injustice of it all. She looked as if she might hit the Doctor, so Steven called out: ‘How far do you think we are from the Dalek City?’

‘Just a couple of miles, according to my calculations,’

the Doctor answered, taking his bearings. ‘Yes,’ he decided, pointing the way they were to take, ‘we should be able to make it on foot.’ He spun around, slamming the TARDIS doors behind them.

‘What are we going to do when we get there?’ Steven asked.

‘Plenty of time to think about that on the journey,’ the Doctor hedged, since his plans hadn’t got that far yet.

‘Plenty of time. Well, come along – the quicker we start, the quicker we’ll be there. Follow me.’ He started off at a jaunty pace.

Sara was boiling. ‘How can you stand him?’ she snapped at Steven.

‘You get used to it,’ he assured her. ‘I did.’

‘Before we turned on the scanner, *he* had about as much idea that we were here as we did!’ she complained. ‘Then, before you can turn around, he’s claiming all the credit and I’m the one who said it couldn’t be done!’

‘Very good,’ said Steven, approvingly. ‘You’re getting to know him quite well.’

‘Before this is finished,’ Sara vowed, ‘I’m going to...’

‘ *No you won’t,*’ Steven said. ‘Save all of that anger for the Daleks, eh?’

Abruptly, Sara realized he was right. She shook her head and managed a slight smile. ‘Come on,’ she said, finally.

‘Let’s go after him before he gets lost and blames us for it!’

The Galactic Council of the allies of the Daleks – or, rather, what was left of it – was not in good shape. Only five of them had survived this far: Gearon, Malpha, Sentreal, Beaus and Celation, and they were not at all happy with the way that they had been treated. The five of them were gathered in the conference room, clustered angrily about the circular table bearing the map of the Solar System.

‘There has been so much time wasted!’ Beaus hissed.

‘What has happened to the projected invasion?’

‘We cannot begin it without Mavic Chen,’ Celation objected. ‘He alone can supply the Taranium.’

Malpha shook his head. ‘No! The Daleks have assured me that they will recover the core.’

‘Then we do not *need* Mavic Chen?’ Celation said, the thought appealing. None of them could tolerate his arrogant manner.

‘He no longer merits a place on this Galactic Council,’

Beaus hissed.

‘Silence!’ The Black Dalek had entered the room unobserved. It now glided forward to the table, its eye-stick carefully examining each of the rebellious members of the Alliance. ‘The final meeting of the Galactic Council is now in session. Mavic Chen, representative of the Solar System, will now address the meeting.’

There was a mutter of disapproval at this announcement, then Mavic Chen himself strode into the room. He moved directly to the head of the table, and all eyes centred on him. ‘Fellow delegates,’ he said, grandly.

‘Even as we are assembled here, the great war fleet is awaiting its final orders to begin.’

Surprised by this news, the delegates glanced at one another. Angrily, Celation muttered to Malpha: ‘Since when has Mavic Chen spoken for

the Dalek Supreme?'

Unaware of the hostile feelings towards him, Mavic Chen continued his little pep-talk. 'Once the ships are all fuelled – a matter of a few hours only – then only the command to proceed will be required!'

Malpha slammed down his fist in fury. 'Why is Mavic Chen in possession of information denied to the Council?'

The Black Dalek said nothing.

'Were not the great powers of the outer galaxies to be as one?' Beaus exclaimed. There was a good deal of support over this point, and Mavic Chen was forced to hold up his hands and demand quiet. Reluctantly, the delegates paid attention to him.

'We are, of course, all equal partners with our powerful Dalek allies,' Mavic Chen assured them with a smile – a smile that suddenly vanished. 'But even some *equal* partners can prove to be more equal than others.'

'We have all served the common good!' protested Celation.

'Indeed we have,' Chen agreed, unctuously. 'But I, Mavic Chen, Guardian of the Solar System, supplied the vital ingredient, the Taranium core. And I am solely responsible for its safe return!'

'Any one of us would have accompanied the Daleks,'

Beaus objected.

'And succeeded as I did?' Chen asked, scornfully. ' *No*!

My contribution is greater than *all* of yours!'

Beaus turned to his four fellow delegates. 'With this speech, Mavic Chen has violated every agreement between us!'

'Arrest him,' Malpha insisted, backing up Beaus.

'Such overwhelming ambition must condemn him in the eyes of this conference!' Beaus cried.

'Yes,' Celation hissed in agreement. 'His greed calls for only one reward!'

'Death!' exclaimed Beaus.

Chen turned cold eyes on to him, and then something appeared in his hands. The blaster fired once, and Beaus crumpled to the floor, lifeless. The remaining four delegates stared in horror at Chen and the blaster he held.

Smiling softly, Chen explained: 'The Black Dalek and I had a small discussion before this conference began.' The smile vanished. 'I am now the undisputed leader of this Alliance for the Daleks!'

The four delegates looked at one another in horror, and then to the Black Dalek, hoping for a denial of Mavic Chen's claim. He had gone – there were only the five of them left in the room.

'Where is the Dalek Supreme?' Celation demanded.

Chen was as surprised as the rest, but found a speedy answer in his mind. 'It is clear that he knows I can run this meeting without his help.' Placing the blaster down in front of him, he continued: 'Now we come to the main point of this meeting – the apportioning of the Universe after its conquest. All of you will be responsible for the overseeing of your own galaxies. You will be answerable to the Dalek Supreme.' He smiled. 'And to me!'

Malpha had had quite enough of this. 'We shall see whether or not your rantings have any meaning,' he snarled, and marched to the door. The others followed him, all save Mavic Chen. He remained at the table, a superior smile on his lips. Malpha attempted to trigger the door's opening by touching the sensor pad, but nothing happened. 'It is locked!' he exclaimed, shocked.

At the table, Mavic Chen reacted with disbelief, then fury. He picked up his gun and strode to the door.

'Nonsense,' he declared firmly. He tried his own hand on the pad, assuming that only the other delegates had been excluded from leaving. The door remained closed.

Celation hissed into his ear: 'So you – the great Mavic Chen – made an agreement with the Dalek Supreme!'

'You fool!' Malpha added, bitterly. 'The Daleks used you to double-cross us and keep us occupied. And you, the great Guardian of the Solar System, gullibly believed everything that they told you!'

Though all four delegates were worried, they could at least gloat at Mavic Chen's expense. As for the would-be conqueror of the Universe,

he could do little but hammer on the one small door that kept him from his destiny and beg, whimper and threaten to try to get out. All about him, the delegates laughed and jeered at his utter stupidity at being taken in so thoroughly.

The Doctor led the way through the jungle, occasionally slashing at some growth with his stick. The Daleks had burned down a section of the trees in an attempt to flush out the Doctor when he and Steven had been here before.

The jungle was so prolific, however, that they might even be in that portion again, which had by now regrown. This was Sara's first experience of this nightmare place, and Steven was being careful to alert her to the dangers. He pointed out the gorgeous, orchid-like blooms that spat fire, and the lovely bell-shaped flowers that could snap over her head and constrict to throttle her. He didn't tell her that his source of information was her dead brother, Bret Vyon.

She had enough to think about without being reminded of the brother she had killed.

'Come along, come along,' the Doctor fussed. 'We must make good time.'

'This jungle is hardly the place I'd choose for a quiet stroll,' Sara remarked, bypassing a small patch of lethal moss. It seethed in the acid that it produced to digest its victims.

'Just be especially careful of the Varga plants,' Steven warned. Of all the plants in the jungle, they were the worst

– huge, hairy, white cactus plants. They could move, slowly, and their spines were tipped with a viral poison –

once inside a victim, it would attack their cells and re-form them gradually as another Varga plant. Rational thought would be excluded, and the new Varga plant would have no memory of being human. It would feel only the urge to kill and feed...

'Varga plants?' Sara frowned. 'I've not seen any of them.'

'Now that you mention it,' Steven said, thoughtfully,

'neither have I. Yet I thought the Daleks had planted them as guards all over Kembel.' He turned to the Doctor for advice.

‘Whether the Daleks destroyed them or simply let them die out,’ the Doctor told him, ‘it can mean only one thing: they no longer need guards. Their invasion plans must be almost ready!’

Sara had another thought. ‘Are you *sure* we’re on Kembel?’

‘Certain,’ Steven told her. ‘I can recognize all the rest of these lovely specimens. It must be as the Doctor says – the Daleks don’t need the Vargas any more. They are ready to strike.’

The Black Dalek glided into the invasion control room.

This was not the centre in the Dalek city, but another, larger one – one that the delegates had never seen, nor suspected. Activity here was more determined, and there were larger numbers of Daleks in it. There were many, many more Daleks in this base than the foolish ‘allies’ had ever suspected.

The chief scientist glanced across at the Dalek Supreme.

‘Final preparations have been completed,’ it reported.

‘Order the withdrawal of all patrols to invasion positions,’ the Black Dalek answered.

‘I obey.’ The Dalek moved to the communications section, to begin issuing the necessary instructions.

The Black Dalek felt an overwhelming satisfaction as the final moments approached. ‘The outer worlds will soon be conquered!’ it exclaimed. ‘The Universe will soon be under Dalek domination!’

Another of the technicians moved across to report. ‘The Galactic representatives have been detained as you instructed.’

‘They will be exterminated as the invasion begins.’ The Black Dalek moved to the main panel. In the centre was a huge status screen, filled with green lights. Everything was proceeding exactly as planned.

Turning to the assembled Dalek hordes, the Black Dalek commanded: ‘Commence invasion count-down!’

12

The Secret Of Kembel

The Doctor halted, and gestured through the final fringe of vegetation.

‘The launching pad!’ he exclaimed. ‘And the spaceships of the traitors who sit on the Dalek Alliance!’

Moving up to join him, Sara and Steven could see stretched out in front of them the space-port connected to the buildings of the Dalek city. In their launch cradles sat eight ships, all of differing designs – each belonging to one member of the alien allies of the Daleks. One of the craft was another of the *Spar* class – Mavic Chen’s replacement for the vessel stolen by the Doctor and crashed on the Earth.

The Dalek city was small, merely a dozen metallic buildings. The jungle about the city was cleared in a swath, but sufficiently overgrown to allow them to sneak in without being seen through the space-port.

‘So what do we do now?’ Steven asked.

‘We enter their stronghold,’ the Doctor replied, simply.

‘I never doubted that,’ Steven answered. ‘But to do what?’

Sara slipped her gun from its holster. ‘To fight!’

Steven looked at her in disgust, then swept his arm over the space-port. ‘In front of us is the greatest war force ever assembled in the Universe! And here – the three of us!

We’ll need more than a few good intentions to defeat that lot!’

‘We can sabotage,’ Sara objected. ‘Delay...’

And get ourselves killed,’ Steven pointed out, realistically. ‘Look, I know we’ve got to do *something*, I’m not arguing about that. I just think we ought to have –

well, a plan. Something that will at least give us a chance.’

The Doctor chuckled. ‘Oh, but we have that, my boy –

we have that!’

Steven looked all about them, in mock amazement.

‘What?’

‘Me!’ The Doctor smiled, and tapped his own chest.

Then he turned his gaze back towards the buildings below them. ‘Shall we proceed? After all, we have to find some way of getting into the city.’ He started off, with Sara following him.

Steven was appalled, but he had no option. He tagged along behind, grimly wishing for a small army, a tank, or anything that would make him feel less vulnerable. Was he the only one with the sense to be terrified by this?

There was no sign of any activity at all. They slid through the shadows into the space-port. The ships all lay in their cradles, ready for take-off. But no ground-crew was working on them, no Daleks glided across the open spaces.

In the windows of the buildings beyond, there wasn’t even the slightest suggestion of movement. It was as silent and still as the grave. If the Daleks were getting ready to invade the Galaxy, there was absolutely no sign of it.

In silence, they entered the closest building. The machinery was all operational, and the doors hissed open as they approached. Aside from this, though, there was no sign of life.

‘Completely silent,’ Sara said, quietly.

‘Yes,’ replied the Doctor, in worried tones. ‘We should have been challenged by now.’

‘We haven’t come very far yet,’ Steven offered.

‘What’s that got to do with it?’ the Doctor snapped.

‘Perhaps they’re all too busy elsewhere getting ready for the invasion.’

‘Or else,’ Sara suggested, ‘they think they are now in no danger and did not bother posting guards.’

The Doctor snorted. ‘Personally, I find both of your explanations completely unconvincing.’

‘Then where’s your answer?’ Steven asked.

‘Somewhere ahead of us,’ the Doctor murmured, leading the way again. He had been here before, when he had played the part of one of the delegates to enable him to steal the Taranium core. In his escape route from the city that time, he had memorized as many corridors as

possible.

Now he led his companions through the deserted passages, and into a large, two-storey room.

This was the Dalek control room, from which the Black Dalek had overseen all the plans, the construction of the Time Destructor, the pursuit through time and the final betrayal of the Galactic Council of traitors.

It was completely empty of Daleks.

The wall panels still flashed, the screens still showed scenes from the city and the space-port, and the time-machine still stood in the middle of the room. The only thing missing – though the Doctor and his friends could not know this – was the Time Destructor itself.

'Uncanny,' the Doctor muttered. 'Uncanny.'

He wandered over to the door that led to the conference chamber. As ever, the door hissed open. He led Steven and Sara inside. They walked through the gloom to the brightly lit table, showing the Solar System map and the lecterns for the delegates. This room, too, was deserted.

'I don't understand it, Steven,' Sara whispered. 'I just don't understand it.'

'It's unbelievable,' Steven agreed.

The Doctor stood at the Dalek Supreme's position at the head of the table, and rapped it with his walking stick. The noise sounded like a gun-shot in the stillness. 'Where are they, mmm?' he demanded. 'Where have all the Daleks gone?'

Since none of them could answer this, he hurried back out of the room. Feeling useless and somewhat foolish, Steven and Sara followed him. This running around seemed to be getting them absolutely nowhere at all.

In the control room again, the Doctor studied the layout for a moment, and then headed for one of the panels, a purposeful gleam in his eye. He started to adjust the controls that he found there.

'Can we help?' Steven asked, with strained politeness.

‘Yes,’ the Doctor replied, absently. ‘You can both do something very important.’

‘What’s that?’ asked Sara.

‘Shut up.’ The Doctor finished fiddling with the controls, then tapped a microphone experimentally. When it hummed, he bent to speak into it. ‘This is the control room. Can anybody hear me?’

Sara, annoyed with the Doctor again, snapped at Steven:

‘Do you have any idea what he’s trying to do?’

Suddenly, it hit the astronaut. ‘The spaceships we saw!’

he exclaimed.

‘What about them?’

‘Well, they belong to the representatives of the Dalek Alliance,’ Steven explained. ‘If the ships are still here, perhaps the delegates are. They may know what happened to the Daleks.’

‘Well done, young man!’ the Doctor said, happily, patting his arm. ‘I knew you’d work it out.’ He turned back to the microphone and added: ‘Eventually...’

Sara looked from one smug face to the other. ‘It’s not that brilliant. They could have left with the Daleks.’

‘No,’ the Doctor replied. ‘They would be of no use to the Daleks during the invasion. They would have been left behind once they had stopped being useful.’

‘Or killed,’ Sara suggested.

‘I don’t think so,’ the Doctor answered.

‘Right!’ Steven said, with sudden insight. ‘The Daleks wouldn’t execute them unless they had absolutely no further use for them. If they *might* need them in the invasion plans, they’d keep them alive!’

The Doctor patted his arm again, and smiled. ‘I can see that you’re beginning to understand the way that the Daleks think. Good! Good!’

Annoyed by the pair of them congratulating one another on their brilliance, Sara snapped: ‘Well, you could be wrong! There hasn’t been

any answer yet.'

'I'll try a wider circuit,' the Doctor decided. He increased the power, and manipulated more of the dials,

'This is the central control room,' he began.

From the speaker came the unmistakable tones of Mavic Chen: 'Who is that?'

'Where are you from?' added Celation's voice.

The Doctor looked smugly at his companions, and then turned his attention back to the microphone. 'Where are you?'

'In detention four,' came back Mavic Chen's reply. 'You go through the conference hall to...'

'We'll find it,' the Doctor replied. He switched off the circuits, and looked at Steven and Sara. 'Well, don't dawdle!' He led the way back into the conference room.

With a shrug, Steven and Sara followed him.

The five 'allies' of the Daleks were now confined to a small cell, where they had spent several hours bickering and calling one another names. Feelings against Mavic Chen ranged from fury to contempt.

Malpha asked: 'Who was it? Do you know?'

'Yes,' Chen replied slowly. 'The time-traveller who calls himself the Doctor.'

'The one who stole the Taranium core?' Malpha asked, in surprise.

'The same.'

Thinking for a moment, Malpha whirled and pointed at Chen. 'Already you have betrayed us! This could be another trick! You could have made some private arrangement with this Doctor!'

'Nonsense,' Chen replied. 'He is not the type to make deals.'

'Then why should he come back?'

Chen shrugged, not really caring why the Doctor did anything. 'I dare say that when he arrives, he will tell us.

The important thing is that once he releases us, we can destroy the Daleks! Between us, we can muster a greater force than they can! We can form our own Galactic Council!' Already, Chen was planning with his usual gigantic visionary strokes.

This dream was punctured by Celation's crisp retort: 'So that you can betray us again and seek to rule once more? I think not!'

Before the discussion could get more heated, a panel in the door hissed open, and the Doctor stood in the doorway, looking at them in grim amusement. 'Well, well, well!' he murmured. 'What an extraordinary sight! The rulers of five mighty galaxies – in one tiny cell!'

'I wish I could share your amusement, Doctor,' Mavic Chen said, smoothly. 'But unfortunately, the joke is very much on us.'

'Yes, I'm afraid it is,' the Doctor answered. 'However, you do have one last chance of saving yourselves.'

'How?' asked Malpha, eagerly.

'It is impossible,' Celation hissed. 'The Daleks betrayed us!'

'As *you* betrayed *your* people,' the Doctor snapped back.

'You said that there was a chance,' Malpha reminded him.

'Yes, I did.' The Doctor looked them over carefully.

'The Daleks have left Kembel. From somewhere in the universe they will strike at, and conquer, your galaxies.

Galaxies that will not be prepared for war, because of your treacheries!'

Mavic Chen winced. 'Must you moralize, Doctor?'

'Yes.' The Doctor glared hard at him in particular.

'Especially if it will help you to see reason. The one chance that I spoke of for you is to return to your people and warn them.'

'They would kill us!' Celation protested.

'You deserve no less,' the Doctor said, coldly. 'But they will not kill you if you warn them. You could redeem yourselves by inventing

some plausible cover story to excuse your knowledge. Then you could get your revenge on the Daleks!'

The five members of the dissociated Alliance looked at one another. Eventually, they nodded their agreement.

Malpha crossed to the Doctor.

'You are right,' he agreed. 'We shall do as you suggest.'

Celation moved eagerly to join him. 'Not only will we *defend* our galaxies,' he promised, 'but we shall warn those of the perished members of the Alliance. And we shall organize an enormous search of all the planets for the Dalek invasion force!'

'Wherever they are hiding,' vowed Malpha, 'we shall find them – and we shall destroy them, as they planned to destroy us!'

Their sincerity was self-evident. The Doctor nodded.

'Release them, Steven,' he ordered over his shoulder.

Steven hit the control pad by the door, which hissed open.

Celation moved forward, giving a small half-bow.

'Thank you, Doctor.'

'We must return to our ships,' Malpha urged. 'We cannot afford to waste any of the valuable time that remains us.' He and his fellow aliens rushed off down the corridor towards the landing field.

As Mavic Chen moved to follow them, Sara brought up her blaster, and pointed it between his eyes. Her own were pools of dark thoughts. 'The time of retribution,' she announced, 'is *now*!'

As her finger tightened on the trigger, the Doctor's stick caught her on the arm, deflecting the shot. 'No!' he exclaimed, as the ray melted a hole in the door-frame. For a second, the look in Sara's eyes was that of a savage animal, and she seemed set to leap on the Doctor. Then, with terrible strain on her self-control, she returned to normal. ' *Why*?' she hissed.

'Because he is the only one who can unite the Earth right now against the Daleks!' the Doctor answered. 'Yes, he deserves to die a hundred times for what he has done –

but if he is dead, who can lead the fight? You *know* that the political chaos that would follow Chen's death would fragment the leadership of the Solar System. He *has* to live!'

Sara's inner struggle was dreadful to watch. Both Steven and the Doctor knew that she wanted to kill Mavic Chen to avenge her brother's death. But she could see the logic of what the Doctor was saying. Logic and vengeance warred within her for a moment, and finally logic won. With great reluctance, she holstered her weapon.

'Thank you, Doctor,' Mavic Chen said, pleasantly.

With a furious face, the Doctor rounded on him. 'Don't thank me,' he snarled. 'In other circumstances, I might well have pulled the trigger myself.'

'Then what are you going to do?'

'I shall continue on my wanderings,' the Doctor said, simply. 'My ship is not built to help in this fight. I must leave it to you and the others.'

Chen nodded. 'We shall not fail you, Doctor.' He moved off after the other delegates towards the launch field.

With a sigh, the Doctor placed a hand on Sara's shoulder. 'And what of you?' he asked. 'Will you return to Earth with him – or continue with us on our journeys?'

Sara avoided looking at him. 'If I return with Mavic Chen, I might not be able to stop myself from killing him tomorrow,' she said, bitterly. 'Perhaps the Solar System would be safer if I stayed with you.'

'Well, not the most positive of acceptances, but no doubt heart-felt,' the Doctor observed. 'Come along, both of you –

let's get back to the TARDIS.'

Together, they left the strangely deserted city, and plunged back into the jungle. A short while later, the noise of the first of the ships lifting off reached their ears. They paused to look back. A bright streak lit the sky as Malpha's ship rose into the air.

'That's the first of them, Doctor,' Steven commented.

'Yes,' the old man agreed. 'And we must wish them well.'

Three further ships – Celation's, Gearon's and Sentreal's

– followed the first into the sky. In moments, all of then had vanished. The only powered-up vessel left now was the Spar bearing Mavic Chen back to the Earth. It still lay in the launch cradle, though it was obviously ready for launch.

'What's the matter with him?' Sara muttered. 'Why doesn't he take off?'

'Something's gone wrong!' Steven exclaimed, pointing.

'Look!'

As they watched in helpless shock, they could see a small jet of flame shoot from the afterburners of the Spar.

Smoke started to belch from the sleek craft, then, suddenly, the whole ship was an immense fireball, which then collapsed back on to itself. The sound reached them seconds later. The wreckage was showering burning debris all over the space-port. Only the fact that the city was almost entirely constructed from metal prevented all of the buildings from catching fire.

'He couldn't have escaped from that,' said Steven, softly.

The Spar was little more than scattered metal fragments and blazing fuel now.

'So Mavic Chen has finally paid for his crimes,' the Doctor said. 'In full.'

'Good,' Sara commented. 'At least the others got away.'

'Yes,' nodded the Doctor. 'And I think we can be fairly certain that they'll do as they promised.'

'Then it's all over,' Steven observed.

With a grin, Sara added: 'We warned the Universe and stopped the Daleks!'

'Feeling pretty pleased with yourself, aren't you, young lady?' the Doctor said. 'Well, I suppose it's understandable.

Perfectly understandable.'

'Well, we don't have to stand *here* and congratulate ourselves,' Steven muttered. The stench from the burning fuel was almost overpowering.

‘Let’s go back to the TARDIS.’

Relieved now that it all seemed to be over, the Doctor smiled broadly. ‘A splendid suggestion,’ he agreed. ‘Would you care to lead the way?’

‘I would count it an honour,’ Steven laughed, executing a pretty good bow. Talking and joking, the three of them set off through the jungle in high spirits – yet nevertheless keeping a wary eye on the lethal vegetation.

The trek back proved to be much more relaxed, despite their alertness, but after a while, Steven said, doubtfully:

‘You know, I don’t think letting me lead was such a good idea. I think we’re lost.’

‘Nonsense,’ the Doctor snorted. ‘This was the way that we came. I can remember it like the back of my hand.’

Sara wasn’t so sure. She glanced around. ‘It all looks so alike...’

‘And I’m sure it wasn’t this far,’ Steven began, when Sara shushed him, and gestured for them to listen.

They could all hear something moving through the jungle. ‘Quickly!’ the Doctor hissed, leading the way behind one of the relatively safe tree-like growths. This attacked only smaller animals, and it ignored the three of them completely. After a moment, the vegetation parted, and into sight came a Dalek.

It paused for a moment, as if getting its bearings, and then moved off down the path that the travellers had been taking.

The three of them were astounded at the sight, not knowing that this was one of the final patrol members recalled by the orders of the Dalek Supreme. As soon as it was out of earshot, the Doctor whispered: ‘We must follow it! Come on!’

The three of them trailed the Dalek silently through the jungle paths. It seemed to be heading for a small range of hills a couple of miles away. After half an hour or so, the Doctor gestured for Sara and Steven to halt.

The Dalek had vanished.

‘Where’s it gone?’ Sara asked, puzzled.

‘Apparently,’ the Doctor observed, ‘into the ground...’

he pointed.

To the right of the pathway, there was a dark shadow.

As they drew level, they could see that it was clearly the mouth of a tunnel, leading into the face of a small, rocky hill. They could see that it was simply dirt for the first twenty feet or so, then they caught the unmistakable glint of metal.

‘Down there,’ Sara breathed.

‘Do you think there are more of them?’ Steven asked, worried. Just when everything had seemed to be settled...

‘ *More* of them?’ the Doctor echoed. ‘My dear boy, I think that’s where *all* of the Daleks are. The whole of their invasion force.’ He looked at them both in turn for their thoughts.

‘Underground!’ Steven exclaimed. ‘Yes, of course! It’s a pity we didn’t think of it before!’

‘And we’re the only ones who know,’ Sara added, slowly.

‘The Daleks planned this in case the representatives *did* escape. They realized their one-time allies would warn their own galaxies, and start a hunt for the Daleks. *This* planet, their supposedly abandoned base, will be the only place no one will look for them...’

The Doctor shook his head in disgust at his own foolishness in not having seen this possibility. He started to turn away, and then froze in shock.

‘What’s the matter, Doctor?’ asked Mavic Chen, smoothly. ‘Surprised to see me?’

Sara and Steven whirled round, and saw the arch-traitor covering them with a small blaster and a large smile. He looked quite healthy, and very smug.

‘You’re dead!’ Sara accused him.

‘No,’ Chen replied, drily. ‘But I’m pleased my little pyrotechnic display impressed you. I have returned, soon to be the master of the Universe!’ He gestured at the tunnel with his gun. ‘Perhaps, Kingdom, you would lead the way?’

‘Down there?’ asked the Doctor, dully.

‘That’s right,’ Chen smiled. ‘Down there. I’m quite certain that the Daleks will be delighted to see you all...’

13

Beginning of the End

Faced with no alternative, Sara led the way into the tunnel.

She felt foolish and furious with herself, having simply assumed that Mavic Chen was dead, even after all his examples of trickery. Steven seemed bemused, and at a loss, but the Doctor lingered back, walking closest to Chen and attempting to reason with him.

‘Are you sure you know what you’re doing?’ he asked, trying to get through the Guardian’s massive ego.

‘Quite sure, Doctor,’ Chen said, evenly. ‘Quite sure.’ He smiled at Sara. ‘Well, Kingdom, I thought you’d have something to say to me.’

She glared at him. ‘The only talking I’d do with you would be with that gun you’re holding.’

Chen smirked, as though vastly amused by her hatred.

He looked at his gun thoughtfully. ‘Once a special agent, always a special agent, eh?’ he laughed. ‘You know, Doctor, Kingdom here once *thanked* me for the honour of being asked to kill you...’

‘That was a long time ago!’ Sara spat.

Chen’s grin grew even wider, knowing he’d punctured her pride. ‘Oh, but I remember it very well. I even considered the possibility of letting you join me, you know.

Karlton – my right-hand imbecile,’ he added, for the benefit of the Doctor and Steven, ‘thought it would have been nice. He found Kingdom most attractive. I simply liked the way she obeyed orders without question – as Bret Vyon discovered to his cost.’

The Doctor gripped Sara tightly before she could do anything foolish. Chen was provoking her, looking for an excuse to gun her down without mercy. Furious, the Doctor glared at Chen: ‘Why did you come back here?’

‘I didn’t trust you, Doctor.’

Steven could hardly believe his ears. ‘ *You* didn’t trust *us*?’ he queried, amazed at the effrontery of the man.

‘You seemed so anxious for the Galactic members to leave,’ Chen explained. ‘I wondered why.’

‘To save the Universe from the Daleks!’ Steven said.

Chen sneered openly. ‘Most commendable – but totally unbelievable!’ He shook his head, his lips curling, caught between amusement and contempt. ‘No. You knew where the Daleks were, and you wanted to join them yourselves –

without any of the rest of us!’

‘He’s mad!’ Steven cried.

‘Yes, he is,’ the Doctor agreed, softly. ‘Mad with a lust for power that is incomprehensible!’

‘You can’t deny it. Doctor,’ Chen said, referring to his theory. His own mind was so twisted with its plots and schemes that he saw others doing the same – especially the Doctor, whose mental ability almost matched his own!

‘We were going back to our ship,’ the Doctor informed him, coldly.

‘Then what are you doing here?’

‘We followed a Dalek!’ Steven exclaimed. ‘They’ve got to be stopped and...’

‘Stopped!’ Mavic Chen laughed, and shook his head.

‘The three of you – stop the Daleks? Come, now! Why should you even care? Your machine can take you places that even the Daleks will never reach. Why should you put yourselves in danger when you could just spirit yourselves away?’ Chen could not even imagine anyone working with a selfless reason. The man was a mass of selfish emotions –

greed, self-preservation and a thirst for power that went far into insanity. The idea that someone might actually risk his or her life for another human being was totally unthinkable to him. ‘If you *must* lie, you can do better than that!’

‘We’ve listened to your rantings for long enough!’ the Doctor snapped.

Chen’s face went cold, furious at the insult. His finger tightened on the trigger of his blaster. ‘Much as I want to present you to the Daleks alive, I would not hesitate to kill you.’ The Doctor saw that Mavic Chen had indeed now crossed the line from dangerous egomania into complete and utter insanity – and that he was accordingly unpredictable.

Steven shook his head in disgust. ‘You just won’t accept that they don’t take partners, will you?’

Chen stood tall, and sneered down at Steven. ‘This time I have proved beyond all doubt that they need me!’

The Doctor knew that however wrong Mavic Chen might be about the Daleks needing him, they would still be very pleased to see the Doctor and his friends. There was only one thing that the Daleks would enjoy more than the extermination of their greatest foe – and that was the conquest of the Universe. Thanks to the madness of Mavic Chen, they might just be given both.

In the heart of the hill lay the true Dalek control room, the one that the delegates had never suspected existed. The Daleks had spent years preparing Kembel to receive their invasion fleet. Patiently, they had excavated a series of natural caverns in these hills and transformed them into the heart of their plans. An immense Dalek task-force had been secreted away, along with the ships and supplies that would enable the group to strike well into the Solar System. The city on the surface had been constructed as a sham to delude the Galactic delegates into thinking that their efforts were needed to conquer the Universe.

From their very beginnings, the Daleks had held but one single idea uppermost in their minds: the extermination of all non-Dalek forms of life. They had discovered that many alien creatures possessed a vast degree of stupidity, trust and greed, and had used these faults to lure into their plans the last remaining items that they needed to construct the Time Destructor. With its completion, the need for pretence had gone, and the Daleks now stood as they had always done – alone, poised for the conquest of all matter.

The Black Dalek was considering this inevitable success deep within the heart of the control complex. It had taken many thousands of years to reach this ultimate pinnacle –

years of frustration, semi-success and sometimes outright failure. The time-traveller known as the Doctor had interfered with many of their plans, but even he had failed to stop this, their masterplan, about to come to fruition.

'Count-down has now reached the final phase,' the technician Dalek reported.

The Black Dalek spun to look at the cannon-like form of the Time Destructor. It had been transferred here from the surface city while the foolish delegates had been squabbling for supremacy. The only reward for their help would be utter extermination. 'The Time Destructor will be placed in the lead ship.'

'Preparations for its transfer are almost complete.'

At the security panel, the administrator Dalek responded to a call. It then swung its head about to face towards the Black Dalek. 'Prisoners have been taken at entrance five,' it reported.

This was not expected. 'Prisoners?' the Dalek Supreme queried.

'The guard reports that the group consists of Mavic Chen and the three time-travellers.'

The Black Dalek had a definite feeling that this moment had been somehow laid down in the destiny of the Dalek race since its beginnings. 'Is the one they call *Doctor* among them?'

'Yes.'

'Have them brought here to the main control complex,'

the Black Dalek ordered. The Doctor, somehow, here and now! It was beyond all coincidence. This final meeting was fated to occur. In moments, the conquest of the Solar System would commence. The Doctor would be forced to helplessly witness it – and he would then be exterminated...

Mavic Chen was not altogether happy with the way that matters were progressing. They had been halted at the end of the tunnel by a Dalek guard, as he had expected. Instead of being congratulated and passed along, however, the guard and a second Dalek had accompanied them through the complex.

'Your assistance, though welcome, is entirely unnecessary,' Mavic

Chen informed the guard. 'I *demand* to take them to the Dalek Supreme alone!'

'You will remain with the others!' the guard grated, otherwise ignoring his comments.

'Your communications network behaves at times with an alarmingly archaic stupidity!' Chen snapped, furious. 'I trust that you *have* notified your control room with the true facts of this situation.'

'Central control has been advised.'

' *Well, advise them again!* ' Mavic Chen yelled. 'Until you realize that the time-travellers are *my* prisoners, I refuse to hand them over.'

The Dalek looked at him again. Had it not been ordered to take Mavic Chen to the control complex, the guard would have simply exterminated him on the spot. The Daleks did not need his *permission* to take the prisoners.

Instead, the guard replied: 'I will verify my orders.'

'Good,' said Chen, slightly mollified.

The Doctor was uninterested in the power struggle under way between Mavic Chen and the Daleks. Instead, he was getting more and more apprehensive as they were led further and further into this complex. At one stage, they were taken across a catwalk hundreds of feet above a huge hangar. Within the vast room were hundreds of Dalek saucers, all of them being prepared for launch.

Thousands of Daleks were swarming about the base, none wasting even a glance on the small party. Immense machinery was now in motion, and energy fields pulsated in the background. Daleks on their flying discs were in the air, checking and sealing each of the saucers, ready for their launch. It was clear from the feverish pace of the activity that the signal to the launch of their vast armada was close at hand.

The day of Armageddon for the entire Universe was drawing perilously near.

The Doctor felt a chill of pure terror run through him.

Glancing around, he saw that both Sara and Steven felt the same shudder of horror. Was there the slightest chance of the three of them

managing even to slow this gigantic fleet, those hundreds of thousands of Daleks now poised to strike?

The Doctor quietly tapped Steven on the arm, and slipped him something, ‘Take this, my boy.’

His companion took it, and glanced swiftly at it before dropping it, unseen by the others, into his pocket. ‘A key to the TARDIS?’ he whispered. ‘Why, Doctor?’

‘I can’t explain now,’ the Doctor hissed back, an almost insane hope being all that was left to him. ‘But if the opportunity presents itself, you’re to take Sara back to the TARDIS – do you understand?’

Sara had caught the last part of the conversation. ‘What about you, Doctor"

He glared at her in annoyance. ‘You’re always asking questions, young woman – and I find that most irritating!’

‘I think we should stay together,’ Steven offered.

‘There’s no sense in us all taking risks,’ the Doctor argued. ‘Now, promise me you’ll do as I say?’

Steven knew that the Doctor had a habit of getting his own way. He also knew that this time, neither he nor Sara would make it easy for the Doctor to boss them about.

‘Only if you tell me what you’re planning.’

This didn’t sit at all well with the Doctor, who disliked being questioned as to plans – especially since he made most of them up on the spur of the moment. However, he saw that Steven was quite serious, and he had to make an effort to explain. ‘It’s just a faint chance,’ he hissed. ‘I don’t know whether I’ll be able to use the situation to our advantage, but Mavic Chen is obviously going to cause some kind of a disturbance. I shall simply seize whatever chance I am presented with – as must you.’

Slowly, Steven nodded. ‘All right, Doctor – I promise.’

They continued on in silence, each of them deep into their own thoughts. They continued to pass swarms of Daleks moving about the base, many carrying items of machinery. Finally they halted, and the lead Dalek swung round to face Manic Chen.

‘New orders have been received.’

‘It’s about time,’ he snapped. ‘And they are?’

‘You are to escort the prisoners to the Dalek Supreme.’

‘I’m glad that you are finally being sensible,’ the traitor smiled. He gestured at the Doctor, Sara and Steven with his blaster. The Dalek moved into place behind Mavic Chen, its own gun raised.

‘We are to... assist you,’ it grated. The gun was centred on the small of Mavic Chen’s hack. Oblivious to this, Chen gestured for the Doctor to proceed. Reluctantly, the Doctor advanced towards the door, which slid open to receive them as they all trooped in.

So this was the real operations room! The Doctor’s quick glance took in the computer banks lining all the walls, and the three levels of catwalks running about the room. The far wall in its entirety was taken up with a map of the local cluster of Galaxies. The Earth’s was pulsing with a sickly green glow, designating it the target of this first attack. Closer to them, the Black Dalek stood, waiting.

In front of the Black Dalek was the Time Destructor. It had been disconnected from its external power source, and had been set into operation. There was a faint hum coming from the device, and slow pulses of light throbbed throughout the barrel of it The vital Taranium core was inserted into it, and the Taranium itself was now powering the device. Though it was not activated, the Doctor could feel the strong forces that it could manipulate, as though they were tightening about him. It was weapon of almost incalculable power.

And it was in the control of the Daleks!

Mavic Chen sensed none of this. The glance he gave to the Time Destructor was one filled with the lust for power, not of horror for its dimension-racking abilities. Ignoring the device. he then strode to the Black Dalek ‘Once again,’

he declared, ‘I – Mavic Chen – Guardian of the Solar System, have helped the Daleks in their plans of conquest.’

The Black Dalek didn’t even look at him. Its gaze was firmly centred on the Doctor. They had met only once before, though the Doctor had been in disguise then, when he stole the core. ‘Our Alliance has ended,’ the Dalek Supreme informed Mavic Chen coldly.

‘Fools!’ the Guardian called. ‘I have saved you again and again from the results of your own incompetence! I –

Mavic Chen – will decide when our Alliance will end.’

Steven looked at Chen in horror. ‘He’s insane. He’s totally insane.’

‘They’ll kill him,’ whispered Sara,

The Doctor quite agreed – but why were the Daleks waiting so long? A suspicion began to creep into his mind.

‘Both of you,’ he said softly. ‘Move with me. Slowly, towards the Time Destructor...’

Mavic Chen had finally gone over the edge. His mind, consumed for years with his own brilliance and Machiavellian grandeur, had consumed itself in its own fires. He had lost all contact with reality, certain of his own ultimate triumph and immortality. It was only right that he should be in command here, and that the Daleks should be his allies – no, his *servants*! ‘You – Dalek *Supreme*,’ he ordered. ‘Tell the Daleks that they are to take their instructions now from *me*.’

The Black Dalek simply looked at him, and the others took its lead. To anyone else. being surrounded by Daleks all staring at him would have been unnerving. To Mavic Chen, however, the reverse was the case. He simply assumed that the Daleks were paying attention to him because they were his servants.

‘Good,’ he purred. ‘I am pleased to see such rapt attention. It had always been my intention to take command of your invasion forces with my own troops.

Now. they will not be needed. They are all waiting in the Solar System for the Dalek fleet to pass them by. when they would then strike at Kembel and aid me. Now, however, you can simply destroy them, along with that over ambitious assistant of mine, Karlton. I, personally, shall take command of the invasion of the Solar System!

The Universe will be mine!’

Steven, Sara and the Doctor edged closer inch by inch to the Time Destructor. while the Daleks’ attention was centred on Mavic Chen. Chen, still blind to his true status, continued with his commands. Turning to the closest Dalek, he ordered: ‘You – bring me the invasion reports.’

He turned to a second, and then suddenly realized that the first one had not moved. Turning back to face it. he snapped: ‘It is essential that I know which stage the operation is in at present. Move!’ The Dalek continued simply to look at him.

Furious now, Chen spun round and pointed an accusing finger at the Black Dalek. ‘You failed to pass on my orders!’ he yelled. ‘ *Why?* ’ Again, there was no reply, simply the wordless, unblinking stare. Chen drew his blaster and pointed it at the Dalek Supreme. ‘Failure to obey brings only one reward!’ He opened fire.

The deadly weapon had no effect at all on the Black Dalek. This finally penetrated through the haze of insanity that had enveloped Mavie Chen, and he ceased firing. He stared at his weapon, then at the Dalek, the support knocked from under his arrogance. Finally, the Black Dalek spoke.

‘Exterminate him!’

The Daleks moved forward, their guns ready. They did not, however, open fire. Chen glared, wild-eyed, at the circle around him, and then at the Dalek Supreme.

‘You cannot turn against me!’ he howled, ‘You will all be punished for this! You will be the ones exterminated! I, Mavic Chen, Guardian of the Solar System, future First Ruler of the entire Universe, Immortal – I decree this!’

Then, suddenly, he lunged forward, breaking free of the circle of Daleks. He ran towards the door, as the Daleks spun and fired. Their weapons melted the frame of the door, but Mavic Chen had already dashed through, and was in the corridor beyond.

‘Pursue and exterminate!’ the Black Dalek commanded.

The Daleks followed the fleeing maniac into the corridor.

Chen whipped about, and threw his useless gun in the direction of his pursuers. ‘You will pay for your crimes against your ruler!’ he screamed. ‘You cannot kill me!"

The Daleks opened fire, and several of the bursts of rays caught him squarely. Mavic Chen staggered slightly, staring at them as the wave of energy washed over him. As it ceased, Chen suddenly realized that he had been terribly, terribly wrong. He was *not* immortal after all...

The Destruction Of Time

As the lifeless body of Mavic Chen hit the floor, the Dalek executioners turned away from it, and moved back into the control room. As they did so, they could see that the Doctor and his companions were bent over the Time Destructor, and that the Doctor was doing something to is controls.

‘Move back!’ the lead Dalek ordered, raising its gun.

The Dalek Supreme had been watching the destruction of Mavic Chen, and had allowed his attention to wander from the Doctor. Now its head snapped around, and it saw that the Doctor had managed to activate the Time Destructor. The barrel of it was pulsing faster, and the whine was much more audible. ‘Do not fire!’ it ordered the execution squad.

‘No, you *can’t*, can you?’ the Doctor said, smugly. ‘I thought it was most interesting that your ray guns were not used until Mavic Chen broke and ran – *away* from the Time Destructor.’ He looked about. making certain that all the Daleks within range were stopped. ‘I assume that your firepower could damage the device.’ He smiled around the room, then wiped the expression from his face as he glared at the Black Dalek. ‘Send one of your Daleks over here.’

The Dalek Supreme had little option. It indicated to the closest Dalek to move forward. The Dalek glided over to the Doctor, keeping its gun distinctly lowered.

The Doctor nodded in approval. To Steven and Sara, he said: ‘Get behind it!’ As they moved to obey, the Doctor stooped and set his arms about the Time Destructor. The device was surprisingly light as he lifted a from its cradle.

It was pulsing slightly faster now, and the whine was spiralling up through the musical octaves. The Daleks instinctively edged forward, until the Doctor spun to face the Black Dalek again.

‘Remember,’ he said, softly, ‘that the Time Destructor is already operating. Slowly – but it will soon begin to accelerate...’ The other Daleks stopped their movements.

The Doctor used the barrel of the Time Destructor to tap the side of the Dalek with him and his companions. ‘Now –

back to the door.'

The Dalek obeyed literally, gliding backwards towards the door, its attention firmly fixed on the Dalek Supreme, awaiting any commands it might be given. Using the Dalek as a shield, the Doctor and his companions moved along with it.

'You will not succeed!' the Black Dalek said.

'Why don't you shut up?' Steven answered.

'We have already pursued you through time; the Dalek replied. 'And we defeated you. We shall do so again, and recover the Time Destructor.'

The Doctor tapped their Dalek shield again, and it halted just short of the doorway. 'Now, both of you,' the Doctor hissed. 'Go back to the TARDIS.'

'What about you, Doctor?' Steven asked, not wanting to leave him.

'You promised me, my boy,' the Doctor snapped.

'But I didn't,' Sara replied, hotly.

'Do you want to ruin everything?' the Doctor snarled.

'The Time Destructor is already operational! It is changing the flow of the years, the forms of everything about us.'

'Including you,' Steven added.

'My dear fellow; the Doctor replied tartly, 'I'm not of *your* race! I'm already over seven hundred years old. What can a few hundred one way or the other matter to me?

Mmm? Now – *do as I say*!'

Sara looked as though she was about to argue further, but Steven grabbed hold of her and dragged her away down the corridor. As he watched them leave, the Doctor glanced down at the Time Destructor. He could feel the immense forces that this small device was warping and straining. He knew that his body could stand only so much of these stresses, and he could only hope that he hadn't miscalculated...

Most of the Daleks were now in position for the launch of the armada, leaving the corridors deserted. Steven ran down them towards the

tunnel they had entered by, dragging Sara. She was digging in her heels, and finally broke free from him.

'We can't leave him. Steven,' she said.

'The Doctor knows what he's doing,' Steven replied, worried, but determined to do as he had been told. 'At least, I think he does.'

Sara disagreed. 'All we're doing is running to save our own lives,' she retorted. 'If something goes wrong, the Daleks will get the Time Destructor back again. Then we will have failed – for ever!' She simply could not bear this thought. She could almost feel her dead brother pressing down on her soul. She couldn't let his death be for nothing. She *couldn't*!

'I know what you mean,' Steven agreed. though he did not actually understand the force of this obsession of Sara's to justify Bret Vyon's death. 'I'd die too if I thought it would help! So would the Doctor! Whatever he's doing, it's because he thinks it's the best way. Now, come on!' He cut short any further argument from her by grabbing her and dragging her along again.

The Doctor had managed to get his young friends free, but he knew that effecting his own escape would be a good deal harder. The Dalek Supreme and the other Daleks could hardly see him while he was hidden behind the Dalek that was just the other side of the doorway. If he tried to move off, the Dalek could spin about. For the moment, the Black Dalek was too afraid of damaging the Time Destructor to give the order to fire, but the Doctor knew that this might still change.

He glanced over the controls for the door, and had a sudden idea, It looked like all the other Dalek doors he had ever seen, since the Daleks tended to evolve what they considered to be a perfect design and then use it in all their projects. In that case, it undoubtedly operated from the small static electrical charge that ran through the metal floors of the buildings... The very first time he had faced the Daleks, on their home world of Skaro, he and his companions had been faced with a door very like this one...

Working carefully, he managed to retain his grip on the Time Destructor, and to slowly free his cloak. He manoeuvred gently, so that the metal clasp and chain that fastened the cloak about his neck would fall precisely where he desired, then threw the coat to the floor and slapped the sensor panel to close the door. The door slid downwards, and contacted his cloak. The metal clasp conducted the

current into the door, making the contact complete, and it stopped dead. The Doctor bent down and tugged his cloak free. It came out, but ripped as it did so.

For a second he was annoyed, but then reflected that getting a new cloak would be a small price to pay for his escape. Dropping the ruined cloak, he sped off down the corridor after his companions as fast as he could.

Inside the control room, the Dalek that had acted as his shield spun about, and hit the sensor switch. However, with the Doctor's cloak pulled free, the contact between the door and floor had been broken. The simple control unit automatically assumed that this meant that the door was already open, and nothing happened.

'Door control jammed,' the Dalek reported.

'Correct the fault immediately!' the Black Dalek ordered. 'Pursue the Doctor and exterminate him!'

The Doctor hurried long as fast as he could. The Time Destructor was beginning to feel very heavy in his arms.

He wondered if he could make it back to the TARDIS

carrying it. At that moment, a figure stepped out of a side corridor. For a second, the Doctor almost cried out, and then he saw that it was a grim-faced Sara. 'What are you doing here?' he snapped.

'I came to help,' Sara replied, simply.

The Doctor bit back an acidic retort. It hardly mattered now – she was with him, whatever he said to her. 'Very well,' he sighed. 'But, remember – this machine is active.

Only over a small area, perhaps, but active none the less. If you start to feel... strange – tell me. Tell me at once!'

'All right,' Sara lied She could already feel the stirring of the time flux about her. This was too important a matter to chance on one person's shoulders – no matter how capable he seemed to be. 'What about them?' She gestured back down the corridor.

'Back to the TARDIS first' the Doctor said, firmly, refusing to worry about more than one problem at a time.

Reaching the surface of Kembel again, Steven paused, and glanced around. He suddenly realized that Sara w not directly behind him, as he had supposed. The stupid girl must have gone back after all to try to help the Doctor.

Steven started to re-enter the tunnel, and then paused. The Doctor would be mad enough at her for returning... if he went as well...

Steven took the TARDIS key from his pocket and looked at it for a moment. He *had* promised the Doctor he'd return to the TARDIS. For all he knew, that might be a very important part of the Doctor's plans.., or was he just trying to justify his own fear? After a further minute or two of agonizing, Steven finally moved off, through the jungle, casting frequent glances back over his shoulder.

He just hoped that the Doctor really did know what he was doing...

A short while later, helped by Sara, the Doctor stumbled out of the tunnel and into the daylight. The jungle seemed subtly different somehow, and the sky was barren of clouds. Sara glanced around, and whispered: 'Doctor –

listen!'

They both did so, and could hear a keening wind, growing in strength and power. Yet the air seemed to be perfectly still at the moment.

'A wind,' Sara commented. 'I've never heard anything quite like that before.'

The Doctor hadn't either. The whistling, rushing noise was still building up. He glanced down at the Time Destructor, which seemed to be pulsing faster. 'It must be the effects of this infernal device; he replied. 'It's acting on the elements that make up this planet, and on the forces locked in the dimensions of time and space! They are starting to break down altogether...'

'Can't you stop it? asked Sara in horror. She didn't dare add that she could feel the changes within herself as well, afraid that the Doctor would send her away.

He shook his head. 'No. And I dare not touch the controls. Without a complete examination, I might only make things worse.'

'Then destroy it!" she snapped, offering him her pistol.

‘ *Impossible!* ’ he exclaimed, ‘Tire one thing that I *do* understand about it is that it will continue to operate until the Taranium core is burnt out – or until the settings can be adjusted. Our only chance is to get it inside the TARDIS. My ship has a field that will neutralize its effects.’

Sara nodded her understanding, and then helped the Doctor to continue. The wind was now becoming physical, blowing the earth and twigs into their bodies as they moved out. The wind tore at their clothes, and howled through the trees. To Sara, it was as though the ghosts of the dead were screaming for company. She could almost make out the form of her brother in the swaying of the trees and the swirling of the loose soil.

‘I’m coming. Bret,’ she vowed under her breath. ‘I’m coming...’

The Black Dalek waited for the Dalek by the door to open it. Planning ahead, the Black Dalek had sent other units through the other exits and levels to attempt to intercept the Doctor, but this doorway led directly to the exit corridor that he would have taken to the surface. There was no time to get any of the combat Daleks into operation from the armada. The ships had been sealed, ready for the launch. which was now delayed. The invasion could not proceed until they recovered the Time Destructor – or destroyed it. They could not chance its falling into the hands of their enemies. If there was no chance of recovering it. they would have to exterminate the Doctor and chance its destruction in the process.

Finally, the Dalek at the door managed to override the mechanism, and the door hissed open. The Dalek then pushed the Doctor’s cloak aside. ‘Obstacle cleared,’ it reported.

The Black Dalek turned to the seven Daleks left in the room. ‘Pursue and exterminate!’

The seven Daleks moved to join the first. and then all eight sped off down the corridor after the Doctor.

Steven finally reached the TARDIS, and stood outside it.

looking back into the jungle. The trees looked older, somehow, and slower. He could have sworn that the several beautiful plants that had struck out at him while he had rushed through the jungle had tired as they failed to catch him.

Come to think of it, he was feeling a little tired himself...

He dragged himself together, and opened the TARDIS

door. The Doctor and Sara might be here any moment, and it would be essential that they get into the TARDIS. He ran over to the main console. and switched on the scanner, focusing it back down the path that he had just traversed, eager for any sight of his friends.

The Doctor was feeling the strain now. His face was streaked with sweat, to which the wind-blown soil had stuck, forming thick trickles of mud. His clothing flapped in the increasing blasts that swept through the dying trees.

The entire jungle seemed to be feeling the effects of the Time Destructor now, ageing almost visibly as he watched.

This section of the jungle, however, seemed somewhat familiar to him. He was certain that they were getting near to the TARDIS. 'Not far to go now.' he called over his shoulder to Sara. When he received no reply, he struggled, and managed to turn, still hugging the Time Destructor to his body.

He could see her in the wind and dust, but she was all *wrong*... it was Sara still, but *aged*... she looked about fifty now, her face thinned out, her wind-tossed hair a light grey instead of a rich brown. Her lithe body was sagging, feeling the effects of age. 'Sara!' he croaked out, in despair.

'Keep going!' she cried over the howl of the winds. Even her voice was changed and cracked with age. 'The Daleks must be after us by now!'

'Sara – the Destructor...' the Doctor gasped, waiting for her to catch up. She was struggling to make headway against the wind, her body becoming more and more frail by the moment.

' *I know!* ' she yelled, and he could barely hear her in the scream of the wind. 'Do you think I don't know what it's doing to me? Keep moving! Keep *moving*!'

She caught up with him, gripping at him with hands that were bonier and thinner than his. At her urging, he plodded on, hunched over the throbbing Time Destructor.

Together, they stumbled through the dying jungle, towards the safety of the TARDIS.

The eight Daleks emerged from the tunnel. The one in the lead

glanced downwards, and switched to infra-red vision.

For some reason, the view proved to be hazy and distorted.

but the Dalek could make out three sets of tracks heading into the jungle. The trail of the fugitives.

All about the Daleks, the winds howled and screamed, testing at them as they moved. Their casings protected them from the worst effects, however, and they moved off after the Doctor and his companions, moving much faster in this eerie world than the humanoids could manage.. It would only be a matter of time before the Daleks caught up with them.

The Doctor stumbled again, as finally the TARDIS came into view. It seemed to be wavering – or was that the effects of the swirling air and the dust? He felt faint and weak, and fell to one knee. Sara paused to try to help him, but she had too little strength left now. The Doctor managed to see her in the blurriness of his failing vision. She was a mass ofwnnkles, skin over bone, with nothing but her indomitable will forcing her to go on.

All about them, the plants had died. They decayed, turning to dust, the landscape changing in moments from jungle to a vast, all-encompassing desert of dust and sand.

The Doctor fell again, and the Time Destructor dropped from his nerveless grasp. It rolled and stopped, barely inches from his clawing fingers. He didn't have the strength to get up again. His failing vision centred on the glowing, pulsing Time Destructor, still fully at work, shaking the foundations of time and space that were wrapped about the planet, and tearing them free, allowing the chaos of entropy to rush in.

Sara collapsed, and felt dust and sand on her face. She hardly had the strength to open her eyes, but somehow she managed it. The twig-like fragility of her arm shocked her, as she clawed towards the fallen Time Destructor. It was no use, no use... she was too weak, ton *old* now... Her dying vision blurred, and in the glow of the Destructor, she felt certain that she could see the smiling face and beckoning finger of her brother's spirit.

Sara felt a sudden peace, and all was still.

Inside the TARDIS, Steven had seen the two figures stumbling across the newly created desert towards him.

The winds howled about their fallen forms and he suddenly realized that they were not going to make it. He dashed to the open door, and outside.

The full force of the gale slammed into him, almost throwing him back inside. Shielding his eyes against the sting of the sand, he staggered towards where Sara had fallen. As he did so, the winds blasted across her fallen form. The skin seemed to melt away, revealing a glimpse of white bone in the haze, and then the bone also vanished, part of the dust blown away in the time winds.

Sara was gone.

He changed his course, staggering towards the Doctor.

As he did so, he stumbled over the Time Destructor. He fell, heavily, and suddenly became aware of how tired he felt. He moved his hand, and saw that it was wrinkled and frail...

He was ageing and dying as well.

In panic and fury, he smashed at the Dalek's weapon.

Something clicked within it, and the glow began to grow stronger. The whine started to change. In sudden fear, Steven clawed at the Doctor, praying that he wasn't just dust and sand, like poor Sara.

The Doctor stirred, and managed to look up. He saw an old face, yet a familiar one, looking down in concern at him. It was Steven! Under those wrinkles, the fading grey hair, it was his young companion, Steven!

'Back!' the Doctor croaked, barely audible above the wind. 'Get back inside the TARDIS!'

Steven grabbed hold of him, and helped him to his feet.

Together, they stumbled through the screaming, tearing winds, back towards the haven of the ship. As they did so, both of them felt their energy returning, their vitality no longer as drained. The closer they got, the stronger they became, and they finally stumbled back inside the TARDIS.

'Close the doors!' the Doctor snapped, his voice once again normal. Steven hurried to obey him, and the doors hissed shut, cutting off the noise and effects of the wind.

The Doctor dusted himself down, then rushed back to the control console. Steven looked round, and the Doctor saw that he was once again his old – *younger* self! He gripped the youth's hand, firmly. 'Thank you, Steven! he cried. 'By chance, you managed to reverse the setting of the Time Destructor! Instead of rushing time forward, it is now racing time backwards and incidentally, restored to us the years that we had lost!'

He suddenly realized that there were just two of them in the TARDIS, and glanced around. 'Sara!'

Unable to speak, Steven simply shook his head in despair.

The Doctor nodded. The Time Destructor had reversed its effects on them, but couldn't help Sara, once she was dead. Wordlessly, they both turned their gaze on to the scanner in time to see the eight Daleks move out of the swirling screen, dust and haze that had once been the jungle.

They moved more slowly than normal, struggling against the wind and its effects. Closing in on the Time Destructor, the leader suddenly saw what was happening.

In desperation, it fired at the device, but failed to harm it.

The winds had grown to maximum intensity now, and the Daleks were spinning out of control across the dust-lashed ground. Two of them hit one another and exploded.

The flames died, and the shapes decayed. The rest of them started to come apart as the time reversal reached its peak.

The metal of their casing fell away, parts vanishing into their component metallic atoms. For a second, the Doctor and Steven could make out the actual Dalek creature within, like a clawed embryo, struggling against the forces of time decay. The Dalek creature shifted and changed, passing back along its evolutionary development. It seemed for a moment to become fully humanoid, then reverted once again to shapelessness, before finally becoming dust and blowing away.

The eight Daleks had vanished without a trace in the screaming landscape.

The ground began to shudder, and to re-form as the Time Destructor continued to reverse the flow of the ages.

It had taken Kembel back to the era of geological changes.

The processes that had formed the hills and the caves used by the Daleks for their hidden bases were abruptly reversed. The hills fell, the caverns closed, the ground shook...

And all was abruptly still. The Time Destructor suddenly stopped glowing, and died. The wind fell, the ground steadied, and an empty silence settled. The dust stopped blowing, and fell like rain back to the surface of Kembel.

As far as the Doctor and Steven could see, everything was desert.

15

The Nightmare is Ended

The TARDIS doors opened, and the Doctor and Steven stepped out on to the planet Kembel. The dust and sands stretched for miles, with nothing else visible. Silently, Steven strode over to a battered piece of metal, rusted and corroded. He picked it up and stared at it.

'The Time Destructor; he said, softly. 'All that's left of it.' 'Yes,' the Doctor nodded. 'The Taranium core finally burnt itself out.'

Steven threw the shapeless chunk back to the ground. 'I wish Sara could have seen the end. She deserved to know that...' His voice caught in his throat.

The Doctor patted him on the back, comfortingly, 'Try not to mourn her death too much, Steven,' he advised. 'She wouldn't have wanted that. All she lived for was the destruction of the Dalek threat. It's over now, and without her help, it could never have been achieved.'

Steven nodded, not trusting himself to reply. The Doctor moved off, poking about with his walking stick.

Finally, Steven joined him. If the Doctor saw tears on Steven's face, he didn't comment on them.

'Do you think that the Dalek fleet is totally destroyed?'

Steven asked.

'Undoubtedly. You saw those Daleks that were after us, how they collapsed back into nothingness. The same most have happened to every Dalek on this planet.' Another thought struck him, and he

looked off into the distance.

‘Even if it hadn’t, the geological upheavals must have totally wrecked everything below ground. No, the Dalek menace is finally finished – at least for here and now.’

‘And the future’?’

‘Mmmm?’ The Doctor looked up. ‘Ihe future? Who’s to say’?’ He clapped Steven on the back. ‘I think we’ve both seen quite enough of this planet. I think it’s time we were on our way.’

Together, they walked back to the TARDIS. The doors closed behind them, and moments later it vanished with its usual noise. It left behind a planet devoid of life, and wiped clean of the horrors that had once existed on it.

The Dalek Prime brooded to itself. About it, the sounds of the capital city of Skaro echoed with activity as its Daleks moved on their tasks, efficiently fulfilling every order, and obeying the Dalek Prime in all things.

The invasion fleet an Kembel had abruptly ceased contact, and that could mean only one thing: it had somehow been defeated. Bearing in mind the reports of the Black Dalek that the Doctor had been involved, this suggested that the wandering time-traveller had somehow managed to defeat the Daleks again. Not only that, but this time, he had also destroyed the Black Dalek, the second-in-command of the Dalek race. Both the invasion fleet and the Black Dalek were irreplaceable.

The Dalek Prime considered. Regret was an emotion he could no longer feel, but there could still burn within him the desire for revenge The next time that the Daleks met the Doctor, the outcome would be very different indeed...

The Universe was safe from the Daleks, for now, but the war was not over yet.

Karlton was close to the edge of panic. There had been no word from Mavic Chen, and the deadline for the Dalek invasion of Earth had come and passed without any report from his advance operatives in the small fleet he had stationed about Venus. Something had clearly gone wrong.

What could have happened? Chen must be dead by now, or perhaps a

prisoner. Karlton was not an incisive thinker, and had risen to his position as head of the SSS because of his ability to follow the commands of Mavic Chen and for no other reason. Without Chen to tell him what to do, Karlton was unsure of himself.

lf Chen had been discovered by the Daleks, then he must be dead. But something had to have happened to the Daleks as well, or they would have invaded the Earth by now... The door to his office opened, and Senator Diksen strode in, flanked by two security men. Karlton sprang to his feet, a protest ready on his lips. He shut his mouth again when he saw the grim fury on Diksen's face.

'Karlton,' the Senator said, in disgust, 'you're under arrest. The charge is high treason.'

'Treason?' Karlton tried to calm down, and act normally. His hands were shaking, and he wanted to collapse.' What do you mean?'

'I mean, you contemptible creature, that you conspired with Mavic Chen to betray the Earth into the clutches of the Daleks. At this moment, a force is on its way to Kembel to arrest the traitor Chen also, and to bring him back here for trial and execution.'

Striving to retain his dignity, Karlton said: 'These charges are ridiculous! Who would accuse me – and Mavic Chen, the Guardian! – of treason?'

Diksen growled, and struck at Karlton with his hand.

Karlton reeled, and felt a trickle of blood on his face. 'You scum!' the Senator snapped. 'Did you think your double-dealing, lying ways could remain hidden for ever?' He opened his other hand, to reveal a small cassette recorder, of the kind used in message rockets. 'You and Chen had Bret Vyon killed, but one of the agents you assigned to the task found this in Vyon's possession, and brought it directly to me.' He pressed the button on it to play the recording.

In the background on the tape were the sounds of the jungle of Kembel. Then a hasty, strained voice began:

'This is Marc Cory, SSS agent, to anyone on Earth.

Guardian of the Solar System, Mavic Chen, and his aide, Karlton, have been conspiring with the Daleks to wipe out the human race and...'

Diksen stopped the tape, and watched the colour slowly drain from

Karlton's face. 'You and Chen thought you had covered your tracks,' Diksen smiled. 'But the dead have come back to haunt you. Neither Marc Cory nor Bret Vyon died in vain, traitor: they will have their final revenge yet!'

Wind whipped across the icy wastelands, driving the snows in huge clouds across the surface of the world. Blocks of ice and snow-laden rocks were the only things to be seen on the barren tundra. Into this white hell, a shape arrived –

apparently another block of ice.

A door in the block cracked open, and the Monk peered out. Instantly, his face and hair were covered in the fine, driven snow. He looked about the ship incredulously. 'A planet of ice?' he exclaimed in disbelief. 'But I didn't set course for this!' He slammed his doors again, kicking at the snow that had drifted inside. Rubbing his face and hair on his sleeve, he scuttled back to the central console to recheck his figures. They had been laid in correctly – there was simply no reason why he should be here.

Unless.

With a sinking feeling, he bent down to examine the underside of the mushroom-shaped console. There, dangling teasingly, were several wires... howling, the Monk examined them, and then straightened up. 'The Doctor's done it again!' he screamed. 'He's *stolen* my directional unit! I'll have to wander around in space and time as lost as he is!' Furiously, he kicked the console, and then winced with pain. Shaking his fist at the roof, he vowed: 'I'll get you for this, Doctor! Somehow, someday – I'll get you for this!'

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